The New Criterion

January 2003

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Editor & Publisher *Hilton Kramer*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
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Assistant to the Editors *Sara E. Lussier*
Technical Associate *Max Watman*
Editorial Intern *Dara Mandle*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen reviews books regularly for *The New Criterion* and other publications.

Hadley Arkes is Ney Professor of Jurisprudence and American Institutions at Amherst College and Vaughan Fellow in the Madison Program at Princeton University.

James Bowman is the American editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement*.

Anthony Daniels is a doctor and writer whose most recent books are *Utopias Elsewhere* and *Monrovia Mon Amour*.

Guy Davenport's most recent book is *Objects on a Table: Harmonious Disarray in Art and Literature* (Counterpoint).

James Franklin is the author of *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability Before Pascal* (Johns Hopkins).

Jeffrey Meyers, a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, has recently completed a life of Somerset Maugham.

Jay Nordlinger is the managing editor and music critic of *National Review*.

Eric Ormsby's most recent book is *Facsimiles of Time: Essays on Poetry and Translation* (The Porcupine's Quill).

David Pryce-Jones is a senior editor of *National Review*. His book *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* was recently reissued by Ivan R. Dee.

Gerald J. Russello, a lawyer, lives in New York City.

Mary Jo Salter's forthcoming book is *Open Shutters: Poems* (Knopf).

Patrick J. Smith is a former editor of *Opera News*.

Mark Steyn is the senior North American correspondent for Britain's Telegraph Group.

Karen Wilkin is the editor of *Ascending Peculiarity: Edward Gorey on Edward Gorey* (Harcourt Brace).

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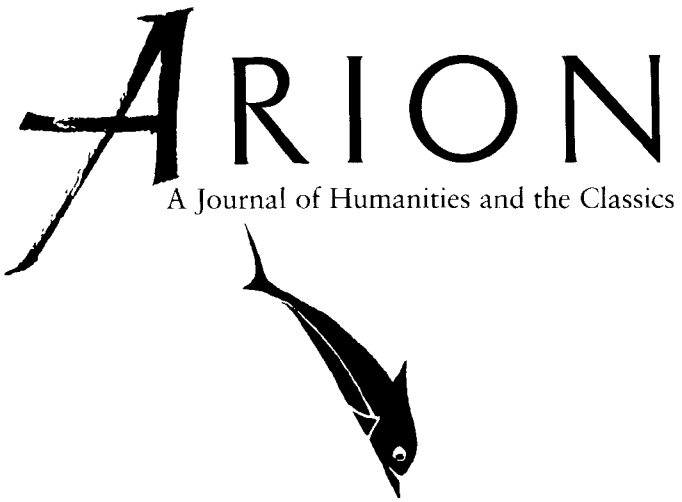

The grand sequence of the classical tradition, which extends in various strands through the Middle Ages and Renaissance to the scientific Enlightenment and modern era, is actually a master paradigm for how to structure an authentically multicultural curriculum on a global scale. All students abroad as well as in the US need to learn the general contours of the world's major artistic and cultural traditions. These long channels of lineage can best be understood as streams—mighty rivers that are fed by tributaries and that are a confluence of mixed and varied material . . .

Camille Paglia, "The Mighty River of Classics"
Arion Volume IX, Number 2.

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Notes & Comments: January 2003

Annals of transgression

"Is it a hoax?" Why is it that some variation of this anxious question accompanies so much of our experience of contemporary art? Why is it, to speak bluntly, that so much of what we are called upon to admire as art has the smirking, rebarbative quality of a bad joke?

These are not, alas, new questions. They are an integral part of cultural life in the aftermath of the avant-garde. From one point of view, such questions are a sign of decadence, for they underscore the extent to which we have lost our bearings in the cultural landscape. How odd, after all, that we must frequently ask ourselves: Is it art? Is it a hoax? Is it both art *and* a hoax?

From another point of view, however, the prevalence of such confusion is a sign of health, for it suggests that we are still alive to essential distinctions between art and non-art. In this sense, the nagging questions that insinuate themselves into much of our experience of contemporary art are signs of vitality: they speak of an immune system robust enough to recognize and challenge nonsense. At a moment when the violation of the boundary between art and life figures so prominently in the practice of art, any hesitation, any qualm, any pause or rejoinder provides a welcome opportunity for reappraisal. As long as one can meet absurdity with the tonic skepticism of disbelief—"Is this some sort of hoax?"—all is not lost.

It was with such modified consolation that we greeted the December 5 headline from Reuters: "Suicide Mistaken for Art Performance." So much for violating the boundary between art and life, we thought: someone has gone further and decided to violate the boundary between art and death.

Well, not exactly. As the wire story explained, visitors to an "off-beat Berlin arts center"—it *would* be a German establishment—mistook a dead woman on the ground for a performance art act. It transpired that a twenty-four-year-old woman who had discussed suicide on videotape with a group of artists at the gallery decided to underscore her words with action: she returned later that day and leapt from a window to her death.

The ultimate transgressive gesture? Or a horrible, pathetic waste of human life? The grotesque side of this episode cannot efface its farcical aspects. Nor can its farcical elements redeem the obscene fact that a suicide might be mistaken for an instance of "performance art." In one sense, of course, the issue is old hat, a relic of Dada, Surrealism, and the counterculture of the Sixties and

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Seventies. Think of Chris Burden, who, in 1974, had himself nailed to a Volkswagen. Think of the many contemporary "body artists" whose performances consist of ritual scarification, body piercing, and mutilation. Remember Ron Athey? Back in 1994, this poor fellow made headlines with an act at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. As the *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune* reported at the time, an HIV-positive man "sliced an abstract design into the flesh of another man, mopped up his blood with towels and sent them winging above the audience on revolving clotheslines." How's that for a cutting-edge performance?

A line can be drawn from Duchamp and Dali through figures like Chris Burden and Ron Athey to news stories reminding us that we've come to a pass where suicide might be mistaken for a work of art. It was about a year ago that we ran an essay reporting on this headline from the BBC: "Cleaner Dumps Hirst Installation." Under that promising rubric was the delicious story of the enterprising janitor at a London gallery who had "cleared away an installation by artist Damien Hirst having mistaken it for rubbish. Emmanuel Asare came across a pile of beer bottles, coffee cups and overflowing ashtrays and cleared them away at the Eyestorm Gallery." Stout work! We are in general adamantly opposed to the practice of cloning, but we might be willing to make an exception in the case of Mr. Asare. A few hundred critics of his thoroughness could help prevent headlines like "Suicide Mistaken for Art Performance" from occurring with such dismaying frequency.

"Brave new world" watch

The art world is not the only contemporary circus of the absurd. Everyday life competes with and often outstrips the most bizarre forces of the cultural avant garde. Or perhaps we should say that everyday life, too, has its avant garde. If mistaking a suicide for an art performance betokens one sort of breakdown, what about the proposals, announced in London last month, to allow transsexuals to marry under an assumed gender? Not only will Jane (né John) be able to marry James (née, possibly, Joan), but also either or both parties will be allowed to obtain new birth certificates emblazoned with only their new name and sex.

The last time we looked, birth certificates were legal documents that guaranteed a few basic facts about an individual: his or her birth date, birth place, birth name, and sex—perhaps we will now have to say "birth sex" or "sex at birth." Henceforth, in Europe, anyway, the birth certificate will be a more negotiable document. The London *Daily Telegraph*, reporting on this story, noted that the original birth records would remain "unamended" and that a link from the new certificate could be traced by agencies such as the Criminal Records Bureau. Nevertheless, as an editorial in that paper commented, what the new proposals mean is that "the law will sanction a lie."

> The new "birth" certificate will state that X was born a woman, when in fact X was born a man, or vice versa. While the state—the Criminal Records Bureau, say—will be entitled to find out a transsexual's original identity, the public will not.
>
> The right to privacy has been elevated above reason, logic and truth. Is this not a reductio ad absurdum of the ideology of human rights? And does it not make an ass of the law?

Well, yes on both counts. And it must also be said that the new proposals, if adopted, will sorely complicate life in some quarters. According to the *Telegraph*, a new bureaucracy will be established with the power to decide whether individuals have, legally, assumed a new identity. "Those wishing to

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register will have to show they have lived under their acquired gender for at least two years," the paper reported. "Surgery," it continued, "will not be a condition of registration"—that's some consolation, we suppose. "It would be possible for someone who retains male sexual organs to register as a woman and marry a man." "O brave new world," Miranda said, "that has such people in't." Lucky creature, she didn't know the half of it.

Stuck in the 1960s

Back when the Vietnam War was raging, perhaps the only person more reviled than Richard Nixon by the radical Left was Henry Kissinger. The former National Security advisor and Secretary of State has served his adopted country with intelligence and indefatigable energy on and off for some five decades. He has, in one capacity or another, labored under six presidents. In return, he has been consistently abused by the Left. Old habits die hard. For no sooner had President Bush announced that he was appointing Mr. Kissinger to chair an independent, bipartisan inquiry into government actions prior to September 11 than the establishment Left accused Mr. Kissinger of—what? Financial peculation? Suspicious campaign contributions from hostile foreign powers? Lying? Obstructing the course of justice? No, no, we are not talking about the Bill and Hillary show. Henry Kissinger stood accused of *consulting for corporate clients*—and he would not tell us which ones.

Gosh. Of course, Mr. Kissinger runs a corporate consulting firm, so it might seem only natural that his clients would, in fact, be corporations. He refused to name those clients for the very sensible reasons that it was private information, that he had confidentiality agreements with many clients, and that the publicity would undoubtedly hurt his business. As the volume of criticism began rising, it became clear that the Left would not allow Mr. Kissinger to serve without destroying the business he had built up over the past few decades. Reluctantly, the seventy-nine-year-old statesman withdrew from contention, thus denying the inquiry the resource of his unparalleled experience.

The Wall Street Journal called the attack "Borking Henry Kissinger." Exactly. The last time we checked, the transitive verb "to bork" had not made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Here's a working definition to be getting on with until Oxford catches up: "Bork, *v. tr.*: An ideological orchestrated assault upon the character, motivation, and abilities of an individual with the aim of preventing his election or appointment to public office." As far as we know, no one has tallied the number of distinguished figures whose services the public has been denied because of the disgusting practices inaugurated when Robert Bork was nominated to a position on the Supreme Court. We suspect it would be an impressive if melancholy list—impressive because of the stature of the men and women denominated, melancholy because few if any survived the calumny well enough to serve the Republic in the role for which they were attacked. It is one more pyhrric victory for the pygmies of the Left.

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Why the West?

by Roger Kimball

Toleration is of all ideas the most modern.
—Walter Bagehot, 1872

In my eyes the west is a perpetual aggressor.
—Arnold Toynbee, 1961

If one allows the infidels to continue playing their role of corrupters on Earth, their eventual moral punishment will be all the stronger. Thus, if we kill the infidels in order to put a stop to their [corrupting] activities, we have indeed done them a service. For their eventual punishment will be less.
—Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, 1984

Beauty contests are not usually occasions fraught with political significance. But the 2002 Miss World contest, scheduled to be held in Nigeria, was an exception. The Muslim population in Nigeria was unhappy about the contest to begin with: imagine allowing women to parade around in public clad in evening gowns instead of burkas! When the Nigerian journalist Isioma Daniel suggested that the Prophet Muhammad might have liked to marry one of the contestants, the grumbling unhappiness erupted into a murderous fury. Enraged Muslims (why does that seem like a pleonasm?) rioted in the city of Kaduna. They destroyed the offices of *ThisDay*, the paper that published Daniel's speculation, and proceeded to kill some five hundred people, ripping Christian women and children from cars and burning them. When the rampage was over, another thousand-odd were left injured and twelve thousand homeless. Some cleric duly pronounced a *fatwa* against the hapless Daniel, who managed to flee. Meanwhile the Miss World pageant was transferred to London.

Of course, this seems like—indeed, it is—business as usual these days. Rampaging Muslims, *fatwas*, and denunciations of the West as "the Great Satan" are a familiar fact of life. They have been at least since the late 1980s when the Ayatollah Khomeini ventured into literary criticism and pronounced a death sentence on Salman Rushdie because someone told him that *The Satanic Verses* was blasphemous. What is odd, what is significant, is how normal this deeply abnormal state of affairs seems to us now. Where, as Bob Dole famously asked, is the outrage?

Reflecting on the massacre in Nigeria, Mark Steyn touched on the crucial issue:

> When was the last time a mob of Jews or Christians or Buddhists tore children from cars and burned them to death? A while back, I saw Terrence McNally's ghastly Broadway jerk-off, *Corpus Christi*, in which a gay Jesus rhapsodizes about the joys of anal intercourse with Judas. The play was an abomination, and deserves all the abuse discriminating theatergoers can heap upon it. But oddly enough, I didn't feel an urge to slaughter perfect strangers, to ram a schoolbus, drag the little moppets from it, douse them in gasoline, and get my matchbook out.

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No, indeed. But why? Is it just that we do things differently in New York and London?

In 1996, the political scientist Samuel Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order.* A much expanded version of an article that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, *The Clash of Civilizations* was and continues to be hugely influential. Huntington's thesis that, in the post-Cold-War world, the bipolar conflict between America and the Soviet Union had given way to conflicts among some eight civilizations was catnip to the many observers who predicted the eclipse of the nation state. Huntington had something for everyone. His argument is supported by dazzling erudition. But I suspect that much of the book's popularity derived from its autumnal mood, its Toynbee-esque contention that the West was a "fading" civilization whose power—economic, social, military—had peaked and was now on the long, circuitous road to decline. Many observers swelled to his oft-repeated warnings about "the West's universalist pretensions," the idea that "peoples in all societies want to adopt Western values, institutions, and practices." At the same time, conservatives applauded Huntington's attack on "the divisive siren call of multiculturalism" and his insistence that "The futures of the United States and of the West depend upon Americans reaffirming their commitment to Western civilization." The prominence Huntington gave to the resurgence of Islamic extremism assured that *The Clash of Civilizations* enjoyed a new lease on life in the aftermath of 9/11.

The reprise was justified. If nothing else, the atrocities of 9/11 dramatized a clash of civilizations. Whatever the limitations of Huntington's argument, his call for a renewed commitment to the values of Western civilization has a special resonance at a time when those values are being assaulted not merely with words but with the engines of terrorist hatred. Huntington has a fair amount to say in passing about the core values of the West. What he does not present is the explicit contrast between the vision of world as embodied in Western civilization and its noisiest rival, the world according to Islam. One of the most thoughtful attempts to do this is contained in *The West and the Rest*, the brief, eloquent new book by the English philosopher Roger Scruton.[1]

The West and the Rest is in many ways a deeply Huntingtonian book. Scruton takes his title from a map in *The Clash of Civilizations*, and his discussion is animated both by a profound sensitivity to the spiritual ambitions of the West and by a conviction that the effort "to transfer those values to places that have been deeply inoculated against them by culture and custom is to invite the very confrontation that we seek to avoid." Scruton's aim is not to expound a theory of international relations. It is rather to show how the West must rescue itself from its own excesses if it is to reassert its distinctive identity and preserve itself from the excesses of the Islamist onslaught.

If books, like whiskey, were rated according to strength, *The West and the Rest* would weigh in above 100 proof. It is a brief book, but concentrated. I do not mean that it is abstruse or hard to understand: on the contrary, Scruton writes with seductive clarity. But he has a lot going on in his 161 pages of text. He neatly summarizes huge tracts of Western political theory, Islamic theology, and the history of terrorism. The result is a book with two themes and one warning. The themes concern the relation between religion and politics, on the one hand, and the fortunes of Enlightenment thinking, on the other. The warning revolves around what we might call the perils of rootlessness, which turn out, in Scruton's reading, to be less a function of poverty and deprivation (as is often claimed) than a natural coefficient of rampant affluence.

Scruton begins by describing the distinc-

1 *The West and the Rest: Globalization and the Terrorist Threat*, by Roger Scruton; ISI Books, 187 pages, $19.95.

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tive political history that has made the West a refuge for individual freedom, economic dynamism, and the pursuit of scientific understanding. It is a familiar story, beginning with the Greeks and the invention of democracy, proceeding through the Roman Empire and its ideals of law and citizenship, and refracted through Christianity, with its domestication of the transcendent, its union of an otherworldly vocation with the acknowledgment of legitimate temporal authority ("Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's . . .").

It is one of the great virtues of *The West and the Rest* that it both affirms and complicates our conventional understanding of the issues at hand. It is often said, and rightly, that the West is the cradle of political freedom. When asked what we are fighting for in the war against terrorism, we say we are fighting to preserve freedom. This is true, but it is not wholly true, for, as Scruton points out, freedom unchecked is ultimately a self-consuming passion. Freedom animates civilization. But understood as the emancipation from restraint, freedom can also appear as the enemy of civilization, for civilization requires restraints. Hence the familiar paradox that freedom, if it is to flourish, requires definition, which means limitation and direction—unfreedom, if you will. This is not to deny the great, the inestimable value of freedom. It is simply to say that freedom cannot be rightly pursued in isolation from the ends that ennoble it. As Scruton puts it, "If *all* that Western civilization offers is freedom, then it is a civilization bent on its own destruction." ("The effect of liberty to individuals," Edmund Burke famously observed, "is that they may do what they please: We ought to see what it will please them to do, before we risque congratulations, which may be soon turned into complaints.")

One of Scruton's central themes, in this book as elsewhere, is what we might call the human requirements of freedom—those appurtenances of humanity without which freedom degenerates. One requirement is summed up in the word "religion." As Scruton notes, "religion" seems to derive from the Latin word meaning "to bind." Religion is not only a doctrine, a creed, it is also a practice that joins its adherents into a community. The gift of religion is the gift of *membership*, a word that figures prominently in Scruton's discussion in this book. It is part of the genius of the West—part of what distinguishes the West from the rest—that it has, almost from the beginning, tempered the binding claims of religion by acknowledging the legitimacy of secular institutions. In this sense, Scruton observes, "The separation of church and state was from the beginning an accepted doctrine of the church. Indeed, this separation *created* the church, which emerged from the Dark Ages as a legal subject, with rights, privileges, and a domestic jurisdiction of its own."

The contrast with Islam is striking. Following the atrocities of September 11, certain well-meaning persons attempted to console us with the assurance that "Islam" means "peace." In fact, as Scruton reminds us, Islam means "submission," specifically submission to the will of Allah. "The *muslim*," consequently, "is the one who has surrendered, submitted, and so obtained security." Of course, plenty of Muslims denounced the terrorist acts of al Qaeda. Still Scruton is right that "Islamism"—Islam embraced as an all-encompassing ideology—is "not an accidental product of the crisis that Islam is currently undergoing, and the fundamental tenets of the faith must be borne in mind by those who wish to understand the terrorist movements." Wherever Islamists have gained power—Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan—the result is "not the reign of peace and prosperity promised by the Prophet, but murder and persecution on a scale matched in our time only by the Nazis and the Communists."

In the West, the church took its place as a secular institution, subordinated, in temporal matters, to temporal authorities. Islam lacks that institutional elasticity. The *ulama*

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("those with knowledge") have their authority directly from God: no church or holy orders, no official compact with the state mediate their supposed revelation. Islam is in this sense a totalitarian ideology: it seeks to embrace and subordinate to its dictates the totality of life. "Like the Communist Party in its Leninist construction," Scruton writes, "Islam aims to control the state without being a subject of the state."

It is curious that security, like freedom, cannot be successfully pursued in isolation from other, complicating ends. Although the West developed out of a common religious tradition, it has long since subordinated religious belief to secular ends, placing its trust, as Scruton summarizes it, "not in religious certainties but in open discussion, trial and error, and the ubiquitousness of doubt." The burden of freedom, the corrosive uncertainty of doubt, has issued in any number of intellectual and moral crises in the West. Nevertheless, the relative political stability of Western civilization, its prosperity, and the value that Western civilization has tended to place on the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake have all provided important compensations for those crises. Islam, by contrast, promises its adherents security. Yet 70 percent of the world's refugees are Muslims fleeing from Muslim states. Where are they going? To the West, of course. The alarming irony, Scruton points out, is that "having arrived in the West, many of these Muslim refugees begin to conceive a hatred of the society by which they find themselves surrounded, and aspire to take revenge against it for some fault so heinous that they can conceive nothing less than final destruction as the fitting punishment." A further and no less alarming irony: by providing welfare benefits without social membership for Muslim refugees, European states have conspired to create within their borders "a breeding ground for Islamic terrorists."

In one sense, *The West and the Rest* is a homily in praise of politics. This might seem odd. After all, the problem of radical Islam might seem to be a problem of *excessive* politics: the politicization of, well, everything. In a sense this is true. But it is only because politics has developed an independent institutional life in the West that Western societies can be governed by the political process without surrendering to it. As Scruton puts it, "The difference between the West and the rest is that Western societies are governed by politics; the rest are ruled by power."

> Western civilization is composed of communities held together by a political process, and by the rights and duties of the citizen as defined by that process. Paradoxically, it is the existence of this political process that enables us to live without politics. Having consigned the business of government to defined offices, occupied successively by people who are the servants and not the masters of those who elected them, we can devote ourselves to what really matters—to the private interests, personal loves, and social customs in which we find our satisfaction. Politics, in other words, makes it possible to separate society from the state, so removing politics from our private lives. Where there is no political process, this separation does not occur. In the totalitarian state or the military dictatorship everything is political precisely because nothing is. Where there is no political process everything that happens is of interest to those in power, since it poses a potential threat to them. . . . The political process is an *achievement*—one that might not have occurred and has not occurred in those parts of the world where Roman law and Christian doctrine have left no mark.

Scruton has two points to make about the political process. One concerns the essentially local roots that the political process depends upon for its animating spirit. The corollary point is that the ideals enshrined in that process cannot be successfully transplanted everywhere. The secular idea of citizenship that is the special achievement of the West coincides with "the emergence of a special kind of pre-political loyalty, which is that of the nation, conceived as a com-

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munity of neighbors sharing language, customs, territory, and a common interest in defense." The nation state, which, to some observers, has seemed to be an impediment to democracy, turns out to be something closer to its precondition. A recurrent theme of *The West and the Rest* is that Western civilization depends upon an idea of citizenship that is "not global at all, but rooted in territorial jurisdiction and national loyalty." Islam, by contrast, is a global ideology in the sense that it regards secular authority by definition as without legitimacy. The *sharia*, the revealed will of God, is the only sanction for law. There is no space left over for politics, for dissent; all dissent is a form of heresy. Thus it is no surprise that a spokesman for al-Muhajiroun, a group of British Muslims with links to Osama bin Laden, publicly contended that no British Muslim has any obligation to British law when it conflicts with the law of Allah.

Since September 11, it has been tempting to locate the source of Islamic fanaticism in al Qaeda, the loose-knit group of radicals who have congregated around bin Laden. Scruton shows that the problem is both broader and older. Wahhabism, the radical sect named for an eighteenth-century zealot, is one important precursor. Another precursor, as Scruton shows, is the formation in Egypt in the late 1920s of the Muslim Brotherhood, whose announced goal was to rid Egypt of foreign powers. The Muslim Brotherhood established a pattern of violence and insurrection that has been followed and perfected. But perhaps the most important figure in this story is the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of Iran. I quote as an epigraph from a speech in which Khomeini advises his followers to kill infidels. "To allow the infidels to stay alive," Khomeini continues after the passage I quoted above,

> means to let them do more corrupting. [To kill them] is a surgical operation commanded by Allah the Creator. . . . Those who follow the rules of the Koran are aware that we have to apply the laws of *qissas* [retribution] and that we have to kill. . . . War is a blessing for the world and for every nation. It is Allah himself who commands men to wage war and to kill.

Scruton is right that the element of insanity in Khomeini's expostulation should not blind us to the fact that it conveys a mood that inspires young men all over the Islamic world. He is also correct that Khomeini brought Islamism up to date: he showed that a radical, violent Islam was possible in the modern world; he showed that it was exportable to the West; and he made martyrdom a central feature of teaching.

Like Huntington, Scruton cautions against the effort to universalize the Western ideals of freedom and citizenship. Not only does that ideal "lack credibility" in most Islamic societies, but, even more troubling, the attempt to inculcate it breeds resentment, which breeds hatred, which ultimately breeds terrorism: precisely the evils that exporting "the West" was meant to cure. Perhaps. It is here, I believe, that Scruton's analysis becomes like the curate's egg: good in part. Globalization is the West's primary economic and cultural ambassador; it is the motor of modernization. Is it therefore, as Scruton suggests, the unwitting ally of terrorism? He is right that Western nations need to reexamine their immigration policies and their pusillanimous commitment to so-called "multiculturalism" (really reflexive anti-Westernism). But to conclude that we need to repudiate our commitment to free trade and dispense with our "devotion to prosperity and habits of consumption" seems to me less a response than a capitulation to the forces that nourish terrorism. Western ideals of freedom and citizenship were born out of a particular social-political tradition. They are, as Scruton says, "an achievement." But to deny that this achievement is sharable is to consign portions of humanity to the status of permanent barbarism. Which would mean that terrorism could never be defeated, only quarantined.

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Eric Hobsbawm: lying to the credulous

by David Pryce-Jones

Eric Hobsbawm is no doubt intelligent and industrious, and he might well have made a notable contribution as a historian. Unfortunately, lifelong devotion to Communism destroyed him as a thinker or interpreter of events. Such original work as he did concerned bandits and outlaws. But even here there is bias, for he rescued them from obscurity not for their own sake but as precursors of Communist revolution. His longer and later books are constructed around the abstractions of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and the supposedly pre-ordained class struggle between them, capital and capitalism, empire and imperialism—in short the Marxist organizing principles which reduce human beings and their varied lives to concepts handy to serve a thesis worked up in advance and in the library. This material, needless to say, was derived from secondary sources.

The purpose of all Hobsbawm's writing, indeed of his life, has been to certify the inevitable triumph of Communism. In the face of whatever might actually have been happening in the Soviet Union and its satellites, he devised reasons to justify or excuse the Communist Party right to its end—long after Russians themselves had realized that Communism had ruined morally and materially everybody and everything within its reach. He loves to describe himself as a professional historian, but someone who has steadily corrupted knowledge into propaganda, and scorns the concept of objective truth, is nothing of the kind, neither a historian nor professional.

It becomes quite a good joke that Communism collapsed under him, proving in the living world that the beliefs and ideas in his head were empty illusions, and all the Marxist and Soviet rhetoric just claptrap. This Hobsbawn cannot understand, never mind accept. His best-known book, *Age of Extremes*, published as recently as 1994, still attempts to whitewash Communism as "a formidable innovation" in social engineering, glossing with fundamental dishonesty over such integral features as enforced famine through collectivization and the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and omitting all mention of the massacre at Katyn, the terrifying secret police apparatus of Beria, and the Gulag. At the same time, Hobsbawm depicts the United States "unfortunately" as a greater danger than the Soviet Union. Presenting him with a prestigious prize for this farrago, the left-wing historian Sir Keith Thomas said, "For pure intelligence applied to history, Eric Hobsbawm has no equal." Another left-winger, the journalist Neal Ascherson, held that "No historian now writing in English can match his overwhelming command of fact and source." So much for Robert Conquest, Sir Kenneth Dover, Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Bernard Lewis, and other genuine scholars.

A mystery peculiar to the twentieth century is that intellectuals were eager to endorse the terror and mass-murder which

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characterized Soviet rule, at one and the same time abdicating humane feelings and all sense of responsibility towards others, and of course perverting the pursuit of truth. The man who sets dogs on concentration camp victims or fires his revolver into the back of their necks is evidently a brute; the intellectual who devises justifications for the brutality is harder to deal with, and far more sinister in the long run. Apologizing for the Soviet Union, such intellectuals licensed and ratified unprecedented crime and tyranny, to degrade and confuse all standards of humanity and morality. Hobsbawm is an outstanding example of the type. The overriding question is: how was someone with his capacity able to deceive himself so completely about reality and take his stand alongside the commissar signing death warrants?

Not long ago, on a popular television show, Hobsbawm explained that the fact of Soviet mass-murdering made no difference to his Communist commitment. In astonishment, his interviewer asked, "What that comes down to is saying that had the radiant tomorrow actually been created, the loss of fifteen, twenty million people might have been justified?" Without hesitation Hobsbawm replied, "Yes." His autobiography, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*,[1] conveys the same point, only rather more deviously. On the very last page, it is true, he is "prepared to concede, with regret, that Lenin's Comintern was not such a good idea," though for no very obvious reason (except as a cheap shot) he concludes the sentence by cramming in the comment that Herzl's Zionism was also not a good idea. Note that slippery use of "Comintern" as a substitute for Communism itself. The concession, such as it is, is anyhow vitiated by an earlier passage when he attacks America and its allies, bizarrely spelled out as India, Israel, and Italy, and referred to as rich and the heirs of fascism. In this passage he predicts, "The world may regret that, faced with Rosa Luxemburg's alternative of socialism and barbarism, it decided against socialism." (Which leaves Americans as barbarians.) By my count, these are the only two expressions of regret in this long book. In contrast, the October revolution remains "the central point of reference in the political universe," and "the dream of the October revolution" is still vivid inside him. He cannot bring himself to refer to Leningrad as St. Petersburg. Learning nothing, he has forgotten nothing.

The key to this limited personality no doubt lies in his background and childhood. His father was an English citizen, though of Central European Jewish origins, and his mother was Viennese. The hazards of his father's career meant that Hobsbawm was born in Egypt, in 1917, though very soon afterwards the family settled in Vienna. In the aftermath of the First War, the time and the place were unpropitious; his father found it hard to make a living as a businessman in Vienna; his mother helped out by doing some writing, including a novel. Both parents died prematurely, and Hobsbawm was brought up by an aunt and uncle in Berlin between 1931 and 1935. At school in that city, he says, he did not suffer any sort of taunting either as a displaced English teenager or as a Jew, but these years induced "the sense of living in some sort of final crisis" and this made him a Communist. When it suits him, of course, he uses his experience of Germany under Hitler to shelter under the convenient label of anti-fascist or socialist.

One of Stalin's major mistakes was to order the German Communists to side with the Nazis against the "social fascists" or Social Democrats, thus consummating Hitler's rise to power. Hobsbawm approved, but he can hardly have understood the implication at the time. A more likely factor determining his Communism, it seems to me, is the remoteness he feels from normal emotions. His parents and their sad lives leave him unmoved. His aunts and uncles are described here with a chilling one-dimensional detachment free from any gratitude for what they did. He also had one sister, younger than he,

1 *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life*, by Eric Hobsbawm; Penguin, 464 pages, $20.

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of whom he says baldly, "She did not share my interests or my life, increasingly dominated by politics." Elsewhere in the book, this sister is written off as "a demonstratively conventional Anglican country matron and Conservative Party activist." He is able to say of himself that his "intellectualism and lack of interest in the world of people" gave him protection. The confession does nothing to mitigate the coldness and inhumanity of such a character.

A scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, refashioned Hobsbawm's life after 1935. An English subject, he was not a refugee, but he was certainly an outsider, and one, moreover, who had the luck to fall into a milieu welcoming to outsiders. King's is one of the most historic English colleges, and one of the richest. Kingsmen have long been a byword for self-satisfaction, quick to attack the privileges they make sure that they are themselves enjoying. In the college was a semi-secret society known as the Apostles, which in the Thirties evolved from embracing a Bloomsbury aestheticism to Communism. Blunt and Burgess and Maclean—as well as other traitors and Soviet agents—had been Apostles slightly ahead of Hobsbawm. It was from this vantage-point that Hobsbawm applauded the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, another of Stalin's major mistakes.

As an active and declared Communist, Hobsbawm remained unpromoted in the ranks throughout the war, and was kept stationed in the country. Hardly surprising, though it still rankles with him. He also suggests that his Communism delayed academic preferment, but in fact a telephone call to a colleague at King's was enough to gain him a fellowship there. After that, he became a professor at Birkbeck College, London, another fortress of the left. It was also always plain sailing for him to obtain his visa to the United States, where eventually he taught regularly. The Cold War saw him become a spokesman for Communism, and a visitor to the Soviet Union and its satellites. In this memoir he continues to glide over Stalin and the criminality of Stalinism. Communists allegedly did not recognize the extent of the Soviet camps. Why ever not? Everybody else did. The United States, he holds, was responsible for waging the Cold War, winning what he considers an undeserved victory. An unfathomable contradiction emerges: the Soviet Union was a superpower inspiring a sixth of the globe yet helplessly weak in the face of the supposedly blind and selfish United States.

For Hobsbawm, Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 was a horror. Khrushchev wantonly sullied the October revolution and its dream. (The implication is that if he had only kept his mouth shut Stalinist criminality could have endured indefinitely.) An immediate consequence was the Hungarian uprising that same year, put down by the Soviets with the usual mixture of duplicity and brute force. Most of Hobsbawm's friends left the Communist Party. He himself made a point of staying, out of pride, the refusal to admit that he might be in the wrong. He has the tiresome habit of quoting at length from his own writings, but he carefully makes sure not to quote the letter he published on 9 November 1956 in the Communist *Daily Worker* defending the Soviet onslaught on Hungary. "While approving, with a heavy heart, of what is now happening in Hungary, we should therefore also say frankly that we think the USSR should withdraw its troops from the country as soon as this is possible." Which is more deceitful, the spirit of this letter, or the omission of any reference to it?

In the course of his life, the only people Hobsbawm seems ever to have known were Communist intellectuals like himself, a good many of them privileged people with private incomes. For many years he had a cottage in Wales on the estate of Clough Williams-Ellis, a rich landowner and baroque architect whose wife Amabel, born into the Strachey family of Bloomsbury fame, was a salon Communist. In a comic mirror-image of the more usual social snobbery, Hobsbawm lets drop, "I refused all contact with the suburban petty-bourgeoisie, which I naturally re-

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garded with contempt." That "naturally" is worth a moment's pause.

Of course some of the people he did know tell a story too, a story of political hysteria and frenzy. He was a friend of Jürgen Kuczynski, an East German Marxist, and his sister Ruth, a Soviet agent who was the contact for Klaus Fuchs, who gave the Soviets the drawings for the atom bomb. He was also the friend of Alexander Rado, who ran a Soviet spy network in Switzerland, and finished up in Hungary. And of the Communist theoretician Louis Althusser, who murdered his wife, and E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams, both Communist writers. (With the latter in 1940 he wrote a defence of the Soviet invasion of Finland.) A female comrade called Freddie was trapped by bomb damage during the London blitz. Thinking that she was about to die, she cried out to the helpers, "Long live the Party, long live Stalin."

Hobsbawm was a contemporary at King's of James Klugmann, already then a Communist, and later a member of the British party's Politburo. His full story remains to be told, but what is known already is a striking illustration of the political hysteria surrounding these people, and the harm that this could do. Special Operations Executive was the wartime unit responsible for partisan warfare behind the German lines, and therefore a special target for Soviet infiltration. Security was lax, and Klugmann was able to worm his way into a senior position in the SOE bureaucracy. As the intercepts in the archives now reveal, as a good Stalinist he falsified the reports from agents in the field in Yugoslavia to SOE headquarters, in order to attribute monarchist acts of resistance to Tito's Communists. This influenced Churchill to switch support from the monarchists to Tito, an essential step facilitating the Communist take-over of Yugoslavia. At the time of the break with Yugoslavia, Moscow forced Klugmann to write a book denouncing Tito whom he had done so much to empower. This book is a collector's item in the rich library of Communist absurdity, along with the defense by Hobsbawm and Williams of the Soviet invasion of Finland. Hobsbawm's final judgment on Klugmann is: "He knew what was right, but shied away from saying it in public." That "shied away" is also worth a moment's pause. What else did Hobsbawm ever do but shy away from what was right? The Communist Party and its claim to unconditional obedience governed him. "We did what it ordered us to do," he writes. Besides, "The Party got things done." The justification is still more childish because he makes sure not to specify or to analyze, and certainly not to criticize, what exactly were these things that the Party got done.

Reduction of human beings and their doings to cerebral figments is the sign of a cold, not to say nasty, character. And Hobsbawm further does himself no favors with his frequent sneering, for instance referring to Orwell not by his literary name but as "an upper-class Englishman called Eric Blair" or applying to American jails the phrase "*univers concentrationnaire*" (originally coined by David Rousset to cover both Nazi and Soviet camps). He multiplies euphemistic observations such as that the odious dictatorship of East Germany was a "firmly structured community" and deserving credit because it held show trials which did not end in executions. He has a passage attacking as "literally senseless" the familiar western Cold War slogan "Better dead than red." Needless to say, this is an inversion of the words, a pure fabrication. Pacifists and Soviet apologists coined the slogan "Better red than dead" in order to persuade the West not to defend itself with nuclear weapons.

Hobsbawm's autobiography brings out the further complicating factor of his Jewishness. His mother apparently told him never to do anything that might suggest he was ashamed of being a Jew. But the relationship between Communism and Jewishness does not allow for anything so simple and straightforward. The theoretical internationalism of the former is in conflict with both the nationalism and the religious separatism of the latter. Some Jews turned to Communism as a release from an identity they did not wish to have for all sorts of

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reasons, some high and some ignoble. Others became Zionists, who were often deviant Marxists to begin with. Hobsbawm shows the consistent Communist animus against Zionism and Israel, losing no chance to sneer on that score about "the small, militarist, culturally disappointing and politically aggressive nation-state which asks for my solidarity on racial grounds." He boasts of a visit to Bir Zeit University on the West Bank to display solidarity with the Palestinians. Why Palestinian nationalism is valid, and Jewish nationalism invalid, is something else Hobsbawm fails to analyze and explain. Quite crudely, he approves of nationalism in countries which proclaim themselves Communist and anti-American, like Cuba or Vietnam, while rejecting nationalism in countries which are not Communist and are pro-American, like Israel. Whatever he may profess about his mother's recommendation, this make him in practice thoroughly ashamed of being Jewish.

The welcome given to Jewish intellectuals who denounce their identity is far greater than the welcome for those who assert it in whatever form. Hobsbawm's success is huge. Portentously but for once truthfully, he declares that he is at the center of the establishment. It says much about present-day Britain that the Blair government awarded him the Companion of Honour, a prestigious decoration, and it says much about Hobsbawm that he accepted it. According to *Who's Who*, he holds something like twenty honorary degrees, many from distinguished institutions such as the University of Chicago, Bard College, and Columbia University. He is also the recipient of many other honors including membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

A companion piece to the dishonest *Age of Extremes*, his memoir has precipitated further cloud-bursts of hyperbole. A history magazine published by the BBC calls him a "key witness" to the twentieth century. Newsnight is a flagship BBC television program on current events, and its anchorman, Jeremy Paxman, makes it his trademark to be abrasive. A suddenly oleaginous Paxman called Hobsbawm to his face the greatest historian of the twentieth century. In *The London Review of Books*, Perry Anderson (once editor of *New Left Review*) elaborated in thousands of words on the largeness of Hobsbawm's mind, and the "complex distinction of the life." Not content with that, in the subsequent issue of the *London Review*, Anderson followed up at many times the length with a turgidly Marxoid essay on his hero, criticizing him only for occasional lapses from Party correctness, and—rather surprisingly—for self-importance. (His reward is to be called "remarkably able" in Hobsbawm's book). Even a conservative reviewer, Niall Ferguson, who found fault with Hobsbawm's Communism, nonetheless thought it undeniable that he is "one of the great historians of his generation."

What can be going on? Part of the indulgence shown to Hobsbawm no doubt stems from admirable British civility, and the desire to accommodate even the most unaccommodating Jewish intellectual. And part of it is hagiography, the left on their knees chanting prayers for one another. But more generally here is a hangover from the Thirties, when apologia for Communism swept aside rationality and common humanity. Proof against all evidence, proof against political reality, a fictitious representation of Communism as a benign force retains its hold somewhere in the imagination even of quite intelligent people. The Soviet Union collapsed with hardly a sigh, like gas going out of a balloon, because it was all a lie. Hobsbawm and his supporters will never admit their share in the central intellectual and moral failure of the times. They lost out in the real historical process, but they hope to win the historiography by turning Communism into some spectral romantic myth shimmering tantalizingly above the surface of things, out of range of truth, and therefore fit to be started up all over again. All it takes is what it always took—an unscrupulous character, lack of interest in the world of people, and well-crafted lying to the credulous.

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The irrepressible Pepys

by Brooke Allen

Samuel Pepys's *Diary* (1660–1669) is an extraordinary document in many ways, but its most extraordinary aspect is that Pepys seems to have had no model for it. In terms of informality and naked self-revelation, it was unprecedented; the only comparable writings to precede it were Montaigne's essays (1580–1588), but Montaigne wrote principally in the interests of philosophical inquiry, which Pepys did not—and in any case Pepys had not read Montaigne when he wrote the *Diary*. It is true that some of Pepys's contemporaries kept journals, the best-known being John Evelyn's, begun in the 1640s. But this was a decorous (not to say dull) chronicle of travel, politics, and public affairs, unlikely to shock anyone. Another of Pepys's friends, the famous scientist Robert Hooke, also wrote a journal, but it was dry and relatively impersonal. So when the twenty-seven-year-old Pepys began his diary he was effectively creating a new genre.

Robert Louis Stevenson saw Pepys as an "unparalleled figure in the annals of mankind," for three reasons:

> first, because he was a man known to his contemporaries in a halo of almost historical pomp, and to his remote descendants with an indecent familiarity, like a tap-room comrade; second, because he has outstripped all competitors in the art of virtue of a conscious honesty about himself; and, third, because, being in many ways a very ordinary person, he has yet placed himself before the public eye with such a fullness and such an intimacy of detail as might be envied by a genius like Montaigne.

What prompted this obscure but rising young clerk to undertake this odd project? Why did he write, and for whom? For himself alone? For posterity? Though he wrote it in shorthand and kept its existence a secret during his lifetime, he must have believed that the *Diary* would be read after his death, for he didn't destroy it, as he did many other papers and documents; indeed he took good care of its six volumes, binding them expensively and leaving them, along with his other books, to Magdalen College, Cambridge. How, then, does one account for an entry like the following (from 1668):

> Thence away to the Strand to my bookseller's, and there stayed an hour and bought that idle, roguish book, *L'escholle des Filles*, which I have bought in plain binding (avoiding the buying of it better bound) because I resolve, as soon as I have read it, to burn it, that it may not stand in the list of books, nor among them, to disgrace them if it should be found.

He destroyed this lewd volume lest it disgrace his posthumous memory; yet at the same time he recorded his reading of the book, *and* its destruction, in the diary he so carefully preserved. As Stevenson asks, "to

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whom was he posing . . . and what, in the name of astonishment, was the nature of the pose?" His behavior is irrational, possibly hypocritical; but the wonderful thing about the *Diary* is its cheerful acceptance of the irrational and the hypocritical. Nothing human is alien to Pepys.

Pepys, middle-class, striving, intelligent without being a genius, selfish, lecherous, greedy for life and all the good things it has to offer, is a classic Everyman, surely as recognizably human to readers in China or Africa as he is to his compatriots. Yet he was also very much a man of his particular circumstances, and the remarkable nature of those circumstances has given his *Diary* historical as well as literary importance. Censorship during the 1660s ensured that only one newspaper was published in London, the government-controlled *London Gazette*. Pepys's vivid insider's account of the political turmoil of the Restoration, as well as his famous eyewitness reports of public events and panics such as the plague of 1665, the great fire of 1666, and the Dutch attack on the Medway in 1667, are uniquely detailed and informative, and have probably done more to shape our vision of Restoration London than the work of any other artist or writer of the period, including Marvell, Dryden, Milton, and the great court painter Lely.

Pepys lived for seventy years, perhaps the most interesting seventy-year span in British history; the *Diary* covers only nine. Claire Tomalin, the author of biographies of Jane Austen, Katherine Mansfield, and Mary Wollstonecraft, has performed the very welcome service of providing us with a full biography of the diarist.[1] The abrupt termination of the *Diary* has always frustrated readers: with failing eyesight and fearful that he was going blind, the thirty-seven-year-old Pepys reluctantly took a course which, as he put it, was "almost as much as to see myself go into my grave—for which, and all the discomforts that will accompany my being blind, the good God prepare me." His eyes soon recovered, but he never resumed the *Diary*, a sad loss for readers and historians. It would have been enlightening to have had his version of the next thirty years: the Test Acts, the Popish Plot, the Glorious Revolution were all events in which, as he rose ever higher in government administration, he was deeply involved; his friendly working relationship with Charles II and his far more intimate knowledge of James II would have made his account uniquely valuable. As Robert Latham, one-time curator of the Pepys Library at Magdalen College, commented, the Pepys *Diary* of the 1670s and 1680s "must rank as one of the most interesting books never written."

The inevitable problem Tomalin has had to contend with is the richness and color of the material for the 1660s, and the thinness of the sources for the rest of Pepys's life. She has struggled somewhat under this handicap, not always with the greatest success. Pepys, so stunningly alive as a young man, abruptly disappears in 1669 and is replaced by an imposing, bewigged, middle-aged civil servant. As he ages he accrues honors and titles, but he becomes ever more distant from the crude youth we so enjoyed.

Pepys was one of the earliest examples, in England, of a self-made man, and as such he stood out as peculiarly modern in a society that still retained many feudal traits. Pepys benefited from this system in his youth, but his life, as it progressed, is emblematic of the erosion of aristocratic prerogative and the beginnings of a new meritocracy.

Pepys belonged to the bottom layer of the middle class: his parents were a tailor and a former washmaid. He possessed, though, an advantage over most of his peers in the form of an upper-class cousin, Edward Montagu, eight years his senior, who was willing to act as patron to this exceptionally bright boy and to drag him along on his own rather rocky road to the top. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642, Pepys was nine, Montagu seventeen years

1 *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self*, by Claire Tomalin; Alfred A. Knopf, 465 pages, $30.

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old, a passionate parliamentarian and a friend of Cromwell's. Montagu joined the Parliamentary army, fought at Marston Moor and Naseby and, in the 1650s, became a member of Cromwell's council of state and eventually the Commonwealth navy's sole general at sea.

Pepys was brought up as a puritan and a parliamentarian sympathizer. He was educated at the very grammar school, in Huntingdon, where Cromwell had been a pupil, and later at St. Paul's, the most puritan of the London schools. "St. Paul's," comments Tomalin, "was responsible for the education of two of the greatest writers of the century, Milton . . . and Pepys. The fact that both have been found shocking is in itself a tribute to the quality of the education they got there." As a schoolboy Pepys snuck out of St. Paul's to watch the execution of Charles I, and remained staunchly unmoved upon that memorable scene; years later he remembered having told his school friends that if he were required to give a sermon on the event, he would take as his text "The memory of the wicked shall rot."

He would occasionally be embarrassed when, as a servant of the Restoration, he was reminded by former schoolfellows that he had been "a great roundhead" in his day, and certainly the Stuarts had few more loyal retainers than he. Still, and for all his pleasure-seeking and lechery, the early puritan ideals never really died. In 1667 he was prompted to reflect on "the bad management of things now compared with what it was in the late rebellious times, when men, some for fear and some for religion, minded their business; which none do now, by being void of both"; a year later he found himself irritated at a performance of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, remarking that "the business of abusing the puritans begins to grow stale, and of no use, they being the people that at last will be found the wisest."

This admiration for Puritanism was strictly secular. In the *Diary* he confessed to being a religious skeptic, and, as Tomalin says, "so little religious feeling did he possess that even at Cambridge [that is, when the Puritan government was in power] he took the sacrament only 'once or twice'—he was not sure which—and then not again for more than ten years." She also remarks on the extreme sparseness of Biblical allusion in the *Diary*, unusual for a writer of his generation. He paid lip service of course, like all his contemporaries, to conventional protestant dogma, but his formulaic thanks to God sound perfunctory except when he expresses gratitude for health or wealth, in which case the tone is more sincere.

It was the puritan efficiency, what we would nowadays call the puritan work ethic, that he admired, not puritan theology. "For myself," he wrote in 1665, "chance without merit brought me in, and that diligence only keeps me so, and will, living as I do among so many lazy people, that the diligent man becomes necessary, that they cannot do anything without him." Diligence was his one and only key to further advancement, and he struggled mightily with its enemies: like Bridget Jones, he filled many diary pages with vows to lay off the booze, and with self-congratulations when he managed to do so. (In a wonderful Jonesian moment he falls happily off the wagon, justifying his behavior by claiming that his oath no longer holds, since his doctor, to whom it was made, has just died of the plague.)

During the 1650s Pepys lived in his cousin Montagu's household as an only slightly glorified servant, Figaro to Montagu's Almaviva. In 1655 he married Elizabeth Marchant de St. Michel, a fourteen-year-old French girl from an impoverished and rather seedy family, and for three years the temperamental young couple lived, uncomfortably and unhappily, in a garret above Montagu's offices in Whitehall; Pepys at this point was still such a lowly insect in the great scheme of things that he did not think of introducing his bride to his patron. In 1658 the couple procured a little house in Axe Yard, Westminster, along with their fourteen-year-old maid, Jane Birch. "A trio

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where they had been a duet," Tomalin says, "and perhaps the trio form suited them better. . . . And since tact was not the foremost quality of either Sam or Elizabeth, much was expected of Jane."

The political climate of the country was ominous. Cromwell died suddenly in September of 1658; Edward Montagu sided with those who wished Richard Cromwell to succeed his father, rather than with the radical republicans. Richard duly took office, but proved as unlike his father as it was possible to be: "The old Vulture died," as one chronicler put it, "and out of his ashes rose a Titmouse." After only a few months he retired, to be replaced by a republican government; but in the leadership vacuum, the emotional tide of the country had definitively turned, and people at the top of government—Edward Montagu included—began to look toward Charles Stuart in his continental exile. In a secret correspondence, Charles offered Montagu rich rewards, an earldom and a fortune, in exchange for his support. It was a moment of tremendous delicacy for those in positions of power, most of whom were well aware that their careers and sometimes even their lives depended on their behavior at this juncture. Montagu knew that "he must judge exactly when to jettison [his] loyalty to the remnants of Cromwell's regime and to make [his] submission to the king, and then to make it so acceptably that he would reward [him] for it."

This is the moment at which the diary begins; it was a turning point in history, in some ways comparable, as Tomalin proposes, to 1989, when power-brokers throughout the Soviet Empire began desperately re-placing bets and shifting alliances while the long pent-up force of the popular will changed their world with an irresistible momentum. In January the army of the kingmaker general, George Monck, crossed the border from Scotland and began marching toward the capital; his support would be critical for either king or parliament, but no one knew, even after he had arrived in London, which side he would give his weight to. With characteristic even-handedness Pepys juxtaposes the dramatic—his first sight of the great army camped ominously in the streets—with the homely: "went walking all over Whitehall, whither Gen. Monke was newly come and we saw all his forces march by in very good plight and stout officers. Thence to my house, where we dined; but with a great deal of patience, for the mutton came in raw and so we were fain to stay the stewing of it."

Monck, as it turned out, put himself at the service of Charles. So did Edward Montagu, who was responsible, as the newly appointed commander of the fleet, for fetching Charles from the Netherlands in a great warship—the *Naseby*, hastily renamed the *Royall Charles*—and bringing him home to England, a journey on which Pepys accompanied his master, describing his impressions memorably: at one point "the shore was so full of people to expect their coming as that it was black (which otherwise is white sand) as everyone would stand by one another"; three days later, he shared a barge "with a dog that the King loved (which shit in the boat, which made us laugh and me think that a King and all that belongs to him are but just as others are").

This is a note that will creep into the *Diary* on many a subsequent occasion. Pepys was a royalist from policy rather than conviction. In 1665 for example, after a meeting with the king and his brother James, Duke of York (the Lord High Admiral, Pepys's ultimate boss at the Admiralty, and the future King James II), he finds himself, as usual, underwhelmed: "God forgive me, though I adore them with all the duty possible, yet the more a man considers and observes them, the less he finds of difference between them and other men, though (blessed be God) they are both princes of great noblenesse and spirits."

It is a magnificent example of damning with faint praise; elsewhere in the *Diary* Pepys is not so polite and rails constantly

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against the luxury of the Court and the indolence and profligacy of the king. The monarchy, seen through Pepys's pragmatic eyes, appears merely a decorative, expensive necessity: necessary because the experiment in republicanism had broken down, and the ultimate post-1688 settlement of constitutional monarchy had not been conceived.

But Charles II looks better in retrospect than he did to sharp contemporaries like Pepys. His weaknesses were manifold but it must be said that he was a great deal better than he could have been. He could have been stubborn and dogmatic, like his father, Charles I, and his brother, James II. Worse, he could have been a power-hungry absolutist, like his fearsome cousin Louis XIV. He was none of those things; he was flexible, canny, willing to work with Parliament. His clemency and utter lack of vindictiveness went far toward healing the dreadful rifts of the 1640s and 1650s. Best of all he was exceedingly tolerant, and if he had had his own way none of the laws against Catholics and Presbyterians passed by Parliament during his reign would ever have been introduced. Like Pepys, he was a modern man, in many ways ahead of his time. His worst qualities were laziness and cynicism; and these are not the deadliest sins.

As a reward for his role in the Restoration Montagu was now created Earl of Sandwich and was heaped with honors and titles: privy councilor, Treasury commissioner, master of Wardrobe, vice-admiral of the navy under the Duke of York. He in turn rewarded his clever servant Pepys: "I will do you all the good Jobbs I can," he promised, and quickly got him a post as clerk of the acts with the Navy Board and a second job at the Privy Seal. Pepys, as Tomalin writes, "knew he owed every part of his good fortune to Lord Sandwich and rejoiced with him. How could he do otherwise? The world had turned over, and he had come out on top."

He was becoming, little by little, a gentleman. As early as March of 1660 he received his first letter addressed to Samuel Pepys, *Esqr.*, "of which, God knows," he comments, "I was not a little proud." A year later he is dining at the Tower in fine style, and expresses his satisfaction fulsomely: "I was much contented to ride in such state into the towre and be received among such high company—while Mr. Mount, my Lady Duchesses gentleman-usher, stood waiting at table, whom I ever thought a man so much above me in all respects."

Pepys's social progress in the early 1660s was a bit like that of Molière's *bourgeois gentilhomme*: he took lessons in singing and dancing, more necessary to an English *gentilhomme* of the period than a French one, since dancing had been banned under the Commonwealth and Pepys, rather incredibly, had never danced in his life until 1661, when he was twenty-eight. He was self-conscious about his deficiencies—"I was forced to dance," he wrote after one shindig, "and did make an ugly shift"—and quickly set out to ameliorate the situation. Another new activity was play-going: the theaters had been closed during the puritan regime. Now they reopened with a vengeance, and, to add to the thrill, Restoration audiences witnessed "the astonishing first appearance on the English stage of women to play women." Pepys was addicted to the theater, although his taste was certainly not of the highest; he almost invariably praised ephemeral junk and rejected the best new plays like *The Rivals* ("the play not good"), older ones like *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* ("a simple play and ill acted"), as well as the Shakespearean classics that he was seeing for the first time: "We saw *Midsummers nights dreame*, which I have never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life."

Pepys's partner in this giddy social ascent was his wife, Elizabeth. Tomalin claims with a certain justice that the *Diary* gives

> as good an account of the married state as has ever been written, its struggles, its woes, its pleasures and its discontents. You might put

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> the Diary into the hands of a Martian to explain the institution and its workings, at least as it existed for the middle classes for three centuries, from the seventeenth until the twentieth, when men held economic and intellectual sway over their wives; and in many aspects it is still perfectly relevant, because its great achievement is to map the tidal waters of marriage, where the waves of feeling ebb and flow from hour to hour and from month to month.

This is true, with the vital *caveat* that the account is entirely one-sided: not one single line of Elizabeth's writing has survived. Not that anyone could accuse Pepys of glossing over his faults or trying to justify them. He was always disarmingly fair-minded, if not in his actual dealings with his wife then at least in his written versions of their quarrels. There are some wonderful observations that anyone who has been a spouse will instantly recognize:

> I see that she is confirmed in it that all that I do is by design, and that my very keeping of the house in dirt [he was supervising some home improvements], and the doing of this and anything else in the house, is but to find her imployment to keep her within and from minding of her pleasure. In which, though I am sorry to see she minds it, is true enough in a great degree.

> We fell very foul; and I do find she doth keep very bad remembrances of my former unkindnesses to her, and doth mightily complain of her want of money and liberty; which I will rather hear and bear the complaint of then grant the contrary.

Pepys was a domestic bully, but Elizabeth gave as good as she got: she had a violent temper to match his own, and never allowed herself to assume the victim's role. One of the very first entries in the *Diary* shows them indulging in a public *fracas* when Elizabeth makes known her resentment at being left at home: "My wife was very unwilling to let me go forth; but with some discontent, would go out if I did; and I going forth towards Whitehall, I saw she fallowed me, and so I stayed and took her round through Whitehall, and so carried her home angry." Physical violence broke out between them from time to time, and again, Elizabeth invariably fought back.

> I was very angry and begun to find fault with my wife for not commanding her servants as she ought. Thereupon, she giving me some cross answer, I did strike her over her left eye such a blow, as the poor wretch did cry out and was in great pain; but yet her spirit was such as to endeavour to bite and scratch me. But I cogging with her, made her leave crying, and sent for butter and parsley, and friends presently with one another; and I up, vexed at my heart to think what I had done, for she was forced to lay a poultice or something to her eye all day, and is black—and the people of the house observed it.

Pepys, as Tomalin points out, did not attempt to cast himself in the *beau rôle*. In 1663, as part of his campaign to educate and "finish" his wife (Stevenson described Elizabeth as vulgar, and though some have objected to the adjective I would say it is a reasonable one), Pepys hired a dancing master, a Mr. Pembleton. At first he was pleased by his Elizabeth's interest in her lessons; then he began to worry that she was a bit *too* interested, and got "a little angry with my wife for minding nothing now but the dancing-maister, having him come twice a day, which is folly." A few days later he found them alone, not dancing but walking! "Now, so deadly full of jealousy I am, that my heart and head did so cast about and fret, that I could not do any business possibly, and ready to chide at everything; and then suddenly to bed and could hardly sleep, yet durst not say anything."

The drama goes on and on, with Pepys skulking around the house, checking the bedsheets to see whether they have been mussed up, worrying to see Pembleton "leer upon" Elizabeth at church, and being made mock of by her. He openly voiced the classic

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male terror, usually unspoken: "I fear, without great discretion, I shall go near to lose too my command over her; and nothing doth it more then giving her this occasion of dancing and other pleasure, whereby her mind . . . finds other sweets besides pleasing of me, and so makes her that she begins not at all to take pleasure in me or study to please me as heretofore."

Both Pepys and his wife were conscious of the timeless double standard he practiced. "God knows, that I do not find honesty enough in my own mind but that upon a small temptation I could be false to her—but God pardon both my sin and my folly herein." The "God pardon" is strictly formulaic; he had no intention of curtailing his own activities, and as he ranted about his wife's friendly feelings for the dancing-master he himself was availing himself of the complaisant Mrs. Betty Lane: "I did give her a Lobster and do so towse her and feel her all over, making her believe how fair and good a skin she had; and endeed, she hath a very white thigh and leg, but monstrous fat."

Pepys might fairly be described as a groper and a grabber, who took his pleasures indiscriminately whenever and wherever they presented themselves. None of his household servants was safe from his wandering hands except for the discreet, well-behaved Jane Birch, who intimidated him: "I have . . . a mind to my own wench, but I dare not, for fear she should prove honest and refuse and then tell my wife." He recorded his conquests gloatingly and in detail, usually in a ludicrous patois made up of French and Spanish with the odd Latin or Italian word thrown in:

> Dressed and had my head combed by my little [servant] girle, to whom I confess je sum demasiado kind, nuper ponendo saepe mes mains in sus dos choses de son breast. Mais il faut que je leave it lest it bring me to alguno major inconvenience.

> I to Westminster, and to Mrs. Martins and did hazer what yo would con her, and did aussi tocar la thigh de su landlady.

Many have assumed that the foreign words were there for purposes of discretion, but this is an absurd assumption since anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of Romance languages can understand what he is getting at, and in any case Elizabeth, the person from whom Pepys had the most to fear, was herself French. It is far more likely that the exotic phrases provided Pepys with an additional sexual frisson, and that using them is his way of reliving the experiences with added gusto.

What makes all this particularly amusing is the fact that Pepys could be so extremely censorious about other men's peccadilloes. When the married Lord Sandwich, who appeared to undergo some sort of midlife crisis in 1663, disgraced himself by going off to live in Chelsea with his mistress, Pepys was deeply shocked and even went to the length of writing him a letter to express his concern—an extremely brave gesture from a lifelong dependent and protegé. The example set by the Court was key: when Pepys remarked in 1660 that Sandwich had become "a perfect Courtier" he did not mean it as a compliment, and he frequently expressed his opinion that "there is nothing almost but bawdry at Court from top to bottom"—though disapproval did not keep him from lusting after Lady Castlemaine, the king's glitzy, high-profile mistress: "strange it is, how for her beauty I am willing to conster all this to the best . . . though I know well enough she is a whore."

Pepys's disapproval—again, that of a secular puritan—seems to have been set in motion principally when adulterous behavior kept a man from doing his work to the best of his ability (something that Pepys never allowed to happen in his own case). It was less the bawdry at Court that Pepys deplored than the lethargy it induced in the royal brothers, who tended to dissipate their not always boundless energy in compulsive womanizing. As for Lord Sandwich, his unwise affair turned out to be the first

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sign of an instability that would eventually damage his career. In 1665 he behaved indiscreetly over a distribution of prize cargoes; there was even talk of impeachment until Charles II saved the day by sending him as Ambassador to Spain. He continued to be an important grandee but never regained the high esteem in which he had formerly been held by the Crown, and from that moment the young Pepys was more or less on his own. Pepys's career, which was to be a series of triumphs—he is still revered by historians for his reorganization of the naval administration, and thought by many to have laid the ground for British dominance of the sea during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—was, in the end, entirely of his own making.

The most dramatic material in the *Diary* comes toward the end, when Elizabeth at last catches him out. He is with their pretty young paid companion, Deb Willet, and while what he is getting up to with her is, as we know, nothing very unusual for him, it is the first time Elizabeth has been faced with it and she is distraught.

> . . . after supper, to have my head combed by Deb, which occasioned the greatest sorrow to me that ever I knew in this world; for my wife, coming up suddenly, did find me imbracing the girl con my hand sub su coats; and endeed, I was with my main in her cunny. I was at a wonderful loss upon it, and the girl also; and I endeavored to put it off, but my wife was struck mute and grew angry, and as her voice came to her, grew quite out of order.

"At a wonderful loss!" One can just picture them standing there with their mouths open. Elizabeth went ballistic. She ranted, raged, wept; she extracted promises from Pepys not only to send Deb away but to stop seeing all the other attractive women they know; she attacked him with hot tongs; she even confessed to being a secret Catholic. Pepys admitted the justice of her anger but couldn't help brooding about the departed Deb: "the truth is, I have a great mind for to have the maidenhead of this girl, which I should not doubt to have if yo could get time para be con her—but she will be gone and I know not whither." It was very much a pre-Romantic age and the concept of being "in love" is foreign to Pepys, but a man in later centuries might well have called himself so. The marital struggle was fought almost to the death, with predictable results: Elizabeth appeared to have won the upper hand, with a contrite Pepys staying home in the evenings reading and even praying with her, but unsurprisingly he had resumed some of his former frolics by the time he brought the diary to its close on May 31, 1669.

In the summer of 1669 Pepys took a holiday to rest his apparently failing eyes, traveling with Elizabeth to France. Upon their return in the autumn, the unthinkable happened: Elizabeth fell ill and, quite quickly, died. Two years later their beloved house burned down; all that Pepys was able to save from the flames were his books, including the *Diary*. The house "that enshrined the memory of his years with Elizabeth" was gone. And Sandwich, too, was soon dead, killed in a sea battle with the Dutch in 1672.

Pepys moved into the Admiralty headquarters at Derby House, and in 1672 was elected to Parliament. As Secretary to the Admiralty and Treasurer for Tangier he exercised considerable power. In 1677 he introduced a new rule that no one should be appointed lieutenant in the navy unless he had served three years, passed an exam in navigation and seamanship, and received a certificate from his captain. "Pepys had made history at stroke," writes Tomalin, "bringing about a revolution in the way the navy was run, fired by his belief that education and intelligence were more useful to the nation than family background and money; and that however gallant and courageous 'gentlemen' captains might be, the service needed to be professionalized."

Pepys's rise was steady but not without reverses, since his career was linked to and dependent upon the Duke of York, who as a

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declared Catholic was in a very vulnerable position: Pepys was imprisoned in the Tower on suspicion of treasonable, pro-Catholic correspondence during the Popish Plot, and again in 1690. In 1684 he was appointed King's Secretary for Naval Affairs and was elected President of the Royal Society, and with the accession of James II in 1685 his influence seemed secure.

But the Glorious Revolution and the defeat and exile of James marked the end of Pepys's career. Whatever his personal opinion of Charles and James Stuart might have been, he knew he owed his career to them and he must have felt he was past the age for accommodation. With the accession of William and Mary he joined the group of so-called "nonjurors" who refused to take an oath of allegiance to the new sovereigns, considering themselves still bound by their earlier oaths to James. So Pepys passed, probably with relief, out of public life.

He never married again; Tomalin suggests, reasonably enough, that he was so exhausted by his intense, combative union with Elizabeth that he simply couldn't face another round. He did enjoy a thirty-three-year union with a discreet lady, Mary Skynner; they lived together in a suite of rooms in the house of Pepys's former clerk and surrogate son, Will Hewer, and their union was accepted as respectable by all his friends. Pepys died, after a painful illness, in 1703.

"There never was a man," commented Stevenson, "nearer being an artist, who yet was not one." This seems a good judgment on Pepys: the greatest of diarists, the greatest of observers, but really a commentator rather than an artist. The reason for this lack would seem to be that Pepys was too extrovert to be an artist. He had, at least insofar as the *Diary* tells the truth, no inner life to speak of: everything was on or near the surface. The closest he came to introspection was during the Deb Willet affair, and he did not delve very deeply even then. He possessed, too, a certain emotional naivete that makes the *Diary* infinitely charming and amusing but deprives it of profound insights.

Pepys's *Diary* was widely read, though in heavily bowdlerized editions, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and up until the Second World War. It is less well known to today's readers, possibly because a full enjoyment of it demands at least a rudimentary knowledge of its historical context, which today's general reader does not possess. Tomalin's biography provides that knowledge; perhaps, armed with her work, a new generation will be inspired to tackle this most colorful, absurd, and instinctively witty chronicler.

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Lionel Trilling & the crisis at Columbia

by Jeffrey Meyers

The seventy-five-page interview with Lionel Trilling conducted in May 1968, which I recently discovered in the Oral History Research Office at Columbia, reveals for the first time his role in the dramatic and sometimes violent uprising at the university. A brilliant teacher, influential critic, and major figure in American intellectual life, Trilling suddenly moved from difficult books and disturbing ideas to confrontations with revolutionary students. During the most important political engagement of his life, he tested his ideas in the cauldron of reality. Diana Trilling, in her long account of the crisis called "On the Steps of Low Library" (1968), focused on her own reaction, ignored Lionel's role in these events, and said: "my husband was still at the University, doing whatever it was that the faculty was then doing, or trying to do." The unpublished Oral History interview explains what he did.

The crisis began with student demonstrations on April 23, 1968 and ended with a police bust in the early hours of April 30. It took place during a volatile and often explosive period in American history: between the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (September 1964) and the student riots in Paris (May 1968), between the assassinations of Martin Luther King in Memphis (April 4, 1968) and of Robert Kennedy in Los Angeles (June 5, 1968), between the March on the Pentagon (October 1967) and the bloody protests at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago (August 1968), between the Tet Offensive (February 1968) and the My Lai Massacre (March 1968) and the escalating protest against the war in Vietnam. Trilling's English department colleague F. W. Dupee wrote that "in its duration and its bitterness, its capacity to absorb every major issue now dividing the nation [it] is probably without precedent in the history of American universities."

The issue that sparked the student revolt was the proposed construction of a gymnasium on university land in nearby Harlem, which would be used both by Columbia students and local residents. It had been approved by Harlem civic organizations, but it was called racist and was opposed by militant elements because it would be used separately rather than jointly and (because of the sloping land) it had two entrances: one for students, one for local residents. But there was no substance in the student complaints. Mark Rudd, the fiery leader of the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), later admitted: "We just manufactured the issues. . . . The gym issue is bull. It doesn't mean anything to anybody."

The students—who took their revolutionary style and dress, their beards and berets, from Che Guevara—seemed, Dupee wrote, "to unite the politics of a guerrilla chieftain with the aesthetic flair of a costumer and an interior decorator." Black students—adjacent to a Harlem still smol-

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dering after the King murder, and effectively stirred up and supported by CORE, SNCC, and the Mau Mau Society—occupied Hamilton Hall, captured Dean Henry Coleman, expelled the white students, and dominated the scene. The whites, more numerous but less powerful, occupied President Grayson Kirk's offices in Low Library. The old-fashioned Classics professor Gilbert Highet, ignoring the intrusions, continued to conduct a doctoral defense. When a student broke in and announced: "This building is occupied," Highet, in his haughtiest British accent, waved him away with: "This *room* is occupied!" The students' demands were essentially: no gym on Morningside Heights, no connection with the Institute of Defense Analysis (which did work for the Pentagon, but which Rudd later called "nothing at Columbia. Just three professors"), amnesty for all demonstrators, and a restructuring of power in the university.

The old radical Dwight Macdonald, summoned to the scene by Dupee's announcement that "It's a revolution! You may never get another chance to see one," described "the complicated interaction between the white communards, the blacks in Hamilton Hall, the sympathizers and the opponents of the strike on the campus, the Administration, the Trustees, and the various faculty groups, plus the 'community' in Harlem." One of the jocks stated that "he had learned more in those six days than in four years of classes."

As the crisis intensified, the administrators (especially President Kirk, later forced to resign) ignored faculty pleas for moderation, lost control of the situation, and finally took the catastrophic decision to call in the police. The black radicals made a separate peace, quietly evacuated Hamilton Hall—and left the whites to be brutalized by the cops. Many faculty members, attempting to interpose themselves between the police and the students, were roughed up (Dupee got a black eye). The cops, taking out their resentment against a young privileged class, charged with flailing nightsticks and seriously injured many students. They did exactly what the radicals wanted them to do and enlisted widespread sympathy for the revolutionaries.

Trilling had been at Columbia for nearly fifty years, his whole adult life apart from an early year at Wisconsin and a recent one at Oxford. He strongly identified with Columbia, which was his life, and saw the disruption as a family crisis. Struggling with a difficult marriage, heavy drinking, and prolonged psychoanalysis, deeply engaged in his own work, and habitually detached from department politics and university administration, Trilling, with all his intelligence and insight, was slow to see the implications of what was happening. There was no precedent for these events in his years as a student and teacher, when few people ever questioned the status quo:

> Certainly not in my own time in college, when the idea of any such student political action would have been, you know, just impossible. We looked with a kind of benevolent cynicism at the university administration. We rather liked the faculty. We took things as they were given to us, pretty much. The president at that time was Nicholas Murray Butler. He was all-powerful in the university. He did pretty much as he wanted. He was generally said to dominate the trustees and to get what he wanted out of them, partly because he had almost, you might say, contrived the university, from a relatively small institution; had secured most of the money to endow it and allow it to expand.

Trilling's first political awareness came, ironically enough, in the Midwest and during one of his rare absences from Columbia. At that time the universities resembled the Princeton of raccoon coats, Stutz Bearcats, and bootleg liquor that Scott Fitzgerald had described in *This Side of Paradise.* Trilling said: "The first time that I remember being involved as a student [i.e., instructor] was in 1926–1927, when I was at the University of Wisconsin, and the

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Progressive senator Robert La Follette ran for President, and that engaged a great many students. But that came to us as a very new thing. Students were simply not political. . . . They were supposed to be wild, have a good time, be antagonistic to Philistine middle-class culture, but purely in personal behavior and taste."

His political awareness deepened during the "low dishonest decade" of the Depression and of the spread of Fascism in Europe when, unlike Trilling, many intellectuals became Communists or fellow travelers. A glimmer of the impending political crisis came to him during a pro-Nazi speech in the 1930s: "I remember one sticky situation, but it was nothing as bad as now, when the students protested the German ambassador's coming here to give a lecture. [President] Butler defended his right to say what he thought, as a kind of academic right. There was a lot of discussion of that. There was a demonstration outside Butler's house, but this was thought to be very ungentlemanly, very extreme—and it was very mild, actually."

Trilling pointed out that "there's been none of the Berkeley protest, about enormous classes and teachers who are indifferent to them or anything of that kind," and couldn't see the objections to building a gym that would be used by Harlem residents. Even more baffling was why the students "give a good God damn about how the university runs. I didn't, why should they? . . . I still can't understand why anybody wants to be politically part of anything so dull as the running of a university." He knew that the students were deeply concerned about the war in Vietnam and with civil liberties, the real objects of their protest, but didn't realize that they had any special quarrel with the administration. Phrases like "it didn't occur to me," "I had no real sense," "I really was not very aware of it," and a "rather friendly hoax" suggest that the crisis was still unreal to him at the very moment it was erupting before his eyes:

> It didn't occur to me that we were coming into a new kind of student political order, of the kind we now have. . . . I had no sense that my students were interested in anything political. . . . I had no real sense of it until the occupation of Hamilton Hall. . . . When I heard that Dean Henry Coleman was being held prisoner, I began to think that this was getting serious, but even then it had a certain possibility of being a student extravagance and a rather friendly hoax. . . . [I dismissed] the existence of SDS as a political force, I really was not very aware of it. I knew that there was student unrest.

Trilling was finally jolted out of his dreamlike naiveté by an unusual confidant: "I came out of Hamilton Hall through the crowd that was forming, and just walked through it without any sense that it was the beginning of a critical situation. . . . At the Faculty Club the barber said, 'Do they still have Dean Coleman prisoner?' He had heard that. . . . This is how I first learned of it. One gets one's information from barbers! Obviously, I was walking around in a state of complete innocence and vagueness about this. I had no awareness of it." Even at this late stage, he "still expected this thing to blow over—until the takeover of Low Library. . . . It wasn't until they occupied the president's office that I began to realize that this was getting very serious."

Professors from the more worldly and practical disciplines—history, government, economics, sociology and law—dominated the faculty discussions. But Trilling, as one of the most eminent and respected scholars at Columbia, was appointed by the president to the three-man faculty committee that advised the administration on student discipline, tried to meet the legitimate demands of the students, and recommended leniency. While they were attempting to mediate between the rioting students and the increasingly impotent administration,

> we were told at once by vice-president [David] Truman—miserable and stern and

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> gray—that they were going to call the police. For me I suppose this was the most dramatic moment of the whole affair. . . . Why were we being called to be told this? We weren't being asked, should we call the police, but told that we are to call them. . . . Obviously the administration wanted some faculty there, while they called the police. . . . I felt that the police should not be called. . . . I felt that we mustn't allow this to happen, as it were, to ourselves. We mustn't be made complicit with this thing.

Trilling's instinctive resistance to the police and desire for cautious deliberation were sound: "It seemed to me that for the administration to make this decision without consulting the faculty, more thoroughly than they did, was a great mistake. . . . I shared the faculty's growing sense that the administration was not handling itself in a very flexible and competent way." The vice-president came back from the meeting "looking very unhappy and saying, 'I've never been so booed in my life.' It was the response of the faculty, I must conclude, that led him [at first] to reverse that decision. . . . The vice-president [then] announced that the police had been countermanded."

At the beginning of the crisis Trilling was still sympathetic to the administration. But he was also impatient and irritated by their rigid response and lack of consultation with the faculty. The main reason for not calling the police, which the faculty saw and the administration, somehow, did not, was that Columbia, physically close to an area of unrest and racial grievance, was extremely vulnerable to racial riots: "There might be mobs coming up. There was talk of burning buildings. My sense of it was that it would be very dangerous to bring the police in to get those black students out, because of what might happen in the popular response."

Most of the faculty would not agree to a complete amnesty—one of the students' major demands—but Trilling's committee tried to come up with a compromise that would reject "vindictive punishment" (which might prevent graduation and ruin careers) and would also be acceptable to the president. The white students, unlike the more self-controlled and orderly blacks who would leave Hamilton Hall as they found it, had stolen the president's private documents, vandalized his office, and urinated on the floor. In one of his most perceptive observations, Trilling said that the students had to be, even wanted to be, disciplined to certify the seriousness of their conduct: "Indeed, their act was diminished if there was no punishment involved."

He also made a surprising but penetrating proposal. In their history of the uprising, *Up Against the Ivy Wall*, the students wrote: "Lionel Trilling rose and, in a move that shocked many of his colleagues, called for amnesty for the black students only. He explained that the students in Hamilton had behaved more reasonably than the whites in the past week and urged that the blacks should be treated more leniently because 'they are newcomers to our community.'" In his interview, Trilling revealed his fair-minded but quite cunning political strategy: "I remember making in desperation a proposal . . . which was a rather strange proposal for me to make. . . . My grounds were partly maliciously political. I thought that possibly if the black students were treated differently from the white students, and if their demands on this point [amnesty] were accepted, a split might be effected. . . . It was partly in desperation at that time. Everybody's efforts were being directed towards anything that could prevent the calling in of the police."

The police bust, with its predictable violence, was postponed. But it was also, with the administration's blind intransigence and its alienation from both faculty and students, inevitable after the black students had left Hamilton Hall. Trilling was shocked to see his friends beaten up by the cops. His emotions as well as his intellect were now fully engaged, and he became tongue-tied in double negatives when he perceived that police violence was part of

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the students' plan to gain sympathy and receive lenient treatment: "I, in principle, had never felt that the police action was never to be possible. I think my feeling against it hardened as time went on. . . . I had the sense that in a way this was exactly what the radical students wanted—it's an obvious technique—and I was horrified by it." He explained that the police, many of whom were struggling to get academic degrees in night school, felt extreme "animosity, jealousy, of the white students who could so easily throw away their educational advantages, treat them so lightly." The students, savagely beaten by the police, finally had a genuine grievance. Trilling's committee recommended that the university, which had no control over the arrests by the police, "urge the dismissal of all charges of criminal trespass and resisting arrest."

Even after the bust, Trilling had trouble "understanding why the protestors were so intransigent. It became more of a problem when I began to have, increasingly had, my sense of their impressiveness. They knew a great deal about the organization of the university." In contrast to the administration and faculty, "they were very articulate, very clear, very rational in everything they said." He also found himself at a total loss to know the real reason for their rage against a weak but admirable institution:

> We thought the student demands were extravagant. [SDS] were not wholly political in their motives . . . they were not concerned with the university itself and their relations with the university, but were simply destructive. They wanted to embarrass the university, dominate the university. . . .
>
> Culturally and indeed socially, the analogy of the university to society breaks down. But they have been treating it as if it were society, and using force against it. . . .
>
> [Their leader] characterized the radicals, obviously SDS, as conceiving of the university as a vulnerable part of the society, and he used a phrase that stayed with me. He said, "Their purpose is to apply gangrene to some part of this body in the hope and expectation that it will spread."

The driving force behind the rebellion, more basic than dissatisfaction with the university or hatred of the war in Vietnam, was the crude lust for power.

After the bust, the mandate of his committee was both "simple and impossible. It was to restore peace to the campus as quickly as possible." The committee had no real power and could only make recommendations, but persuaded the administration to stop construction on the ill-fated gym (the park then reverted to its previous use, a refuge for purse snatchers, muggers, and drug dealers) and to urge the police to drop the criminal charges—a considerable step forward. He ironically said that "we thought of ourselves as a kind of benign Committee of Public Safety, in the French Revolution." (The Committee, set up in 1793, included Danton, Robespierre, and St. Just, evolved into a murderous dictatorship and suppressed all domestic opposition.) A month after the violence was over, Trilling concluded: "I think much would have been done, early in the game, or even after the bust, if the administration or the trustees had said, 'It's obvious that something has gone wrong with this university to make this extremist situation, and we must look into it and see what it is that actually has gone wrong.'" Forcing the university to examine the problem was, late in the game, the students' real achievement.

Diana Trilling reported that a student, fresh out of jail, "rushed to the nearest phone to demand why my writer-husband had not been present to protect the writer-student against the police." The 62-year-old Trilling, unlike his tougher colleagues, did not man the barricades. In a recent interview that I conducted in San Antonio, Jacques Barzun, his confrère and closest friend, described him as a "gentle, charming, lovable creature." Though not engaged in departmental politics, Trilling would express his forthright opinion of those un-

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worthy of tenure. He didn't have favorites among his students, but would make harsh personal judgments about individuals not up to his standards. He would never be a soapbox orator, but he talked to the revolutionaries in 1968 and was an effective mollifying force.

Trilling behaved creditably during the Columbia uprising—the most significant event at the university during his lifetime. He was characteristically detached, slow to perceive the gravity of the crisis, and shocked by the hostility to the administration, but once actively engaged he offered subtle political strategies and shrewd perceptions about the role of the university and its place in society. (Nevertheless, after his death his wife turned bitterly against him and his son—in the spring 1999 issue of the *American Scholar*—absurdly claimed that Trilling suffered from Attention Deficit Disorder.)

Lionel's interview, as he wrote of Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, "is a testimony to the nature of modern political life. It is also a demonstration on the part of its author of one of the right ways of confronting that life." In his Preface to *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), he observed that the best liberal criticism must put "under some degree of pressure the liberal ideas and assumptions of the present time." In the violent revolt against liberalism, when his beliefs and ideals were tested by political reality, he remained committed to liberal values and was intelligent, enlightened, and humane.

The Columbia uprising was closely, and paradoxically, connected to the literature of discontent Trilling had been teaching to thousands of college students for the previous forty years. Modern literature expresses a disenchantment with culture and hostility to civilization; it undermines and even destroys the values of the past. Trilling wrote that potentially damaging works by Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Freud, Conrad, and Mann expressed "the idea of losing oneself up to the point of self-destruction, of surrendering oneself to experience without regard to self-interest or conventional morality, of escaping wholly from the societal bonds." As art and life, thought and action merged, he ruefully concluded that students felt their revolt against society was justified by "all the dissatisfactions that literature generates."

The riots at Columbia spread throughout the country like a plague, with disastrous results for higher education in America. The administrators (never the leading scholars of the university) became stronger as the faculty lost or surrendered its power. Inexperienced students made decisions for which they had no permanent responsibility. Intellectual standards were abandoned. The curriculum was fatally weakened. Affirmative action swept in unqualified students and excluded meritorious ones. Sob stories replaced academic achievement. Ideology became dominant and teachers more dogmatic. And the universities tried to effect social change with token efforts while continuing to produce legions of uneducated graduates. The academy finally took revenge by giving the students exactly what they demanded.

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A new poem
by Mary Jo Salter

In the guesthouse

1. Long exposure, 1892

All of them dead by now, and posed
so stiffly, in their sepia Sunday
best, they seem half-dead already.
Father and Eldest Son, each dressed
in high-cut jacket and floppy tie,
never get to sit in the sitting room.
They stand to face a firing squad
behind Mother and the little girls—
themselves bolt upright on the sofa,
hands at their sides, their center-parted
hair pulled back, two rows of rickrack
flanking the twenty buttons down
the plumb line of their bodices.

And here, discovered alone downstage
and slightly to the left, the boy—
such a beautiful boy. Although
they've tried to make him a little man,
upholstering him in herringbone,
you can see him itching to run out
with his hoop and stick, happy because
even at this moment, when
nobody could be happy, he knows—
in the tilt of his blond head, the frank
time-burning gaze beneath his cowlick—
that he is the most loved.

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2. Flappers, 1925

I'm in the guesthouse some days before
focusing on another portrait:
professional, black-and-white, composed

to lend a spacious dignity
to the one life lived behind each face.
Again, the date's approximate;

I'm guessing from the arty look,
the flapperish, drop-waisted frock
and ropes of wooden beads on the wife

of—yes, it has to be. No more
the poster boy for posterity,
he's a commanding forty. The cowlick's

still there (although now he slicks
it down with something), and he still
cocks his head to one side, a hint

of flirtation, exasperation—what?—
in the eyes he trains at the camera
as if he'd give me what I want

if only he could emerge now from
the frame. We stare in mutual
boldness while his wife's long profile

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is tendered to the child between them.
One girl: a modern family.
I speculate a little son

was lost to the great flu; even so,
this fair-haired Zelda in a bob,
ten years old, would come to seem

enough, the image of her father.
The smile high-cheeked and confident,
the shining eyes, the upturned chin—

people matter more now; they'll die
less often, now that the Great War's over;
everyone's allowed to sit down.

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3. Wheelchair, 2000

The jumbles of grinning faces jammed
together at birthdays and Christmases
in color photos around the house
  don't interest me.

They're merely *today*, or close enough;
anybody can record it
and does; if everything's recorded
  nothing is.

But puttering about, the guest
of a ghost I now am half in love with,
I'm drawn one day to pluck one image
  off the piano.

A wedding. Or some minutes after,
outside a church I've seen in town.
The bride, who has exercised her right
  to veil, white gown,

and any decorum life affords
these days, is surrounded by the girls—
some floral aunts, a gawky niece
  in her first pearls—

and all the men in blazers, khakis . . .
running shoes? Boys will be boys.
Squirming, they squint into the sun:
  some amateur

shutterbug has made sure they can't
see us, or we see them, and yet
I understand now who is shaded
  there in the wheelchair.

Dwindled, elderly, it's Zelda—
her lumpy little body slumped
like a doll's in a highchair, shoes just
  grazing the footrest.

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It must be she. However many
lives her hair went through—Forties
complications held with tortoise-
shell combs; beehives;

softer bouffants like Jackie's; fried
and sprayed gray-pincurl granny perms—
in all the years (say, seventy-five?)
since I last saw her,

she's come back to that sleek, side-parted
bob, which (though it's white) encloses
the girl who's smiling, pert, high-cheeked,
despite the pull

of gravity: just like her father.
Or as he was. *When did he die,*
and how? What was his name? What's yours?
I could find out,

surely, when I leave here; the owner
might well be her granddaughter.
I could scout, too, for snapshots even
more recent—some

get-together with no wheelchair—
to prove what I'm sensing: Zelda's gone.
Why would they bother to frame this scene,
unless it's the last?

But why should *we* care so for people
not us or ours—recognized by sight
alone—whose voices never spoke
with wit or comfort

to us, and whose very thoughts,
imagined, every year grow quainter?
Yet they must have felt this tug as well,
repeatedly

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peering at someone they were bound
to come back to, as in a mirror.
Who says they're more anonymous
than I am,

packing up after my two weeks
in the guesthouse? I make one last study
of Zelda's father, lingering with
the boy, the man,

sealing his developing
face in myself for safekeeping.
Too soon to leave. But then, nobody
ever stays here long.

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Theater

Running on empty

by Mark Steyn

I was reading a Salman Rushdie column the other day and, not for the first time, agreeing with ninety-five percent of it. In fact, I agree with him so often these days I've almost stopped noticing it. But not quite: far away at the back of my mind, I still remember the Rushdie of the 1980s—reflexively leftist, anti-Thatcher, the works. The old line about the liberal mugged by reality goes tenfold for him: he's a liberal whom reality has spent the last thirteen years trying to kill. I still have difficulties with his novels, not least the one that got him into all the trouble, but in his columns and essays at least he has no illusions.

I wonder, though, how he feels about his chums, the old comrades from the BBC arts shows and left-wing salons. Comparatively few liberals get mugged by reality, and among the grand panjandrums of the arts it's rarer still. At the theater, indeed, one often feels mugged by unreality, by strange hazy visions utterly disconnected from human experience. One such is currently one of the hottest tickets in town: *Far Away*, by Caryl Churchill at the New York Theatre Workshop. First seen at the Royal Court in London two years ago, it's a short play—fifty-three minutes for fifty-five bucks—which nevertheless manages to fit in three "acts" of increasingly ludicrous dystopianism. Is Miss Churchill the first absurdist with ADHD? Or is she testing the cravenness of the critics? The flightier and sillier she gets, the more they marvel at the profound truths contained therein:

"For New Yorkers living in the elongated shadow of September 11," says Ben Brantley in *The New York Times*, "the waking dreamscape of *Far Away*, where the promise of violence broods in even the coziest corners, is bound to feel familiar."

"It is hard to imagine a more apt time than ours for this tiny gem of paranoia, desperate humor and cataclysm," writes Linda Winer in *Newsday*.

One reason I trust the trade papers a little more is that they're less prone to reflex ideological boosterism. But, alas, with Miss Churchill, even *Variety*'s Charles Isherwood has succumbed:

> With sabers rattling loud in Washington, the play strikes home as a disturbingly apposite reminder that the comforting narratives of good and evil that are often retailed by figures of authority—a genial aunt in a cardigan sweater or a smiling politician—can be fairy tales concocted to mask darker truths. And belief in them, comforting though it may be, can have terrible repercussions—endless repercussions. Odd as it is, the lunatic vision of *Far Away* seems utterly sane, and very close to home.

Anyone who read these notices might reasonably conclude that the play, though first produced in 2000, had something to say about the strange new world in which

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we find ourselves. Anyone who plunks down his $55 on that basis will be sorely disappointed. One could forgive these fellows for commending Miss Churchill's play as an hour of magnificently deranged public masturbation, but, pace Mr. Brantley, any New Yorkers with even the flimsiest connection to the events of September 11 will be staggered only by the ability of a prominent international dramatist to skate by on such meretricious posturing.

Miss Churchill is distinguished enough to be able to attract A-list collaborators. On this occasion, she has the company of Frances McDormand, the Oscar winning actress from *Fargo*, and Stephen Daldry, who directs enormous amounts of things. Both parties are very good at communicating tension, which is just as well. Miss McDormand isn't really on stage enough to justify either her billing or (I'll bet) her salary but, when she is, there are moments when the play's tiresome tricks seem to coalesce into real character and situation. Daldry, by contrast, is present the whole time. You're aware of him as soon as the scrim goes up. Ian MacNeil has designed a stylized storybook illustration of a country home on which nature seems to be pressing in. The curtain gets cranked up by a squeaky roller, and the squeaks get the first laugh of the evening. The stage is in almost total darkness. If you were to conclude that the picturesque vision on the scrim is a mere façade for society's darker forces, you'd be in the right ballpark. Nothing is obviously amiss, but you sense something's up. This is what Daldry did to such effect in his revival of *An Inspector Calls*, and, working with far thinner material, he gamely keeps his end up.

Gradually, we make out Miss McDormand in a rocking chair. She is a character called Harper. Various animal-like howls rend the air. The lights come up slowly and a little girl in a white nightgown enters. This is Joan (Alexa Eisenstein) and she tells her aunt she can't sleep. All parents will recognize the moment and understand Harper's calm, lulling, reassurances: "Are you cold . . . ? Do you want a drink . . . ? Now what did you imagine you saw in the dark?" Joan says she saw her uncle unloading frightened, wounded people from a truck, beating them, then herding them into a shed, and beating them some more. Perhaps it's a party. "If it's a party," says Joan, "why was there so much blood?" She saw him beat some of them savagely. She saw him club a child.

Now don't worry, says Harper. Your uncle was just trying to help those people. Yes, he had to punish a few of them, but only the bad ones. Joan goes back to bed. The abbatoir beyond the edge of the counterpane has been explained by Auntie: it's just another story about good people and bad people.

That's it. End of "Act" One.

"Act" Two begins: Years have passed and Joan is now grown-up and played by Marin Ireland. She is sweet on a young man at the next table (the highly intense Chris Messina). He is called Todd—hey, isn't that the German for death? They work in a hat factory making fabulous tottering millinery masterpieces for . . . well, a weekly parade of some kind. There are a few reference to trials, and next thing you know we're in a huge stadium, where line after line of ragged, beaten, manacled prisoners parade in a death-row beauty pageant, as the crowd cheers and the condemned men slouch to their execution in gray pajamas and glorious peacock-feathered frilly headgear. Joan and Todd's hats are spectacular. As with Miss America, there is a panel of judges, to select one hat from each parade to be preserved and displayed in a museum. What of the rest? "It seems so sad," sighs Joan, "to burn them with the bodies." If you've ever wondered what the Ascot Gavotte might look like if it kept Cecil Beaton's gladrags but signed Harold Pinter to choreograph, this is it. And what other show has its own milliner (T Tyler Stumpf)? Can we make it a category in the Tonys?

End of "Act" Two. More years pass. "Act" Three: Joan has married Todd and they

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have "escaped" back to auntie's house for a day. War has broken out, not just between nations, but between everything—countries, animals, objects, meteorological phenomena, flora and fauna, beverages, all locked together in bizarre alliances. "The cats have come in on the side of the French." "The rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears. So were the girls by the side of the road." The mallards "commit rape, and they're on the side of the elephants and the Koreans." "Crocodiles are evil." The deer have changed sides. They "get under the feet of shoppers and send them crashing down escalators." The weather has joined up with the Japanese. There are "thousands dead of light in Madagascar" and bodies everywhere, "one killed by coffee," others "killed by heroin, petrol, chain saws, hairspray, foxgloves." Joan has "killed two cats and a child under five," but she was scared to cross the river, not because of the "camp of Chilean soldiers upstream" or the "black-and-white cows downstream" but because she didn't know "whose side the river was on." The partridge has attacked the pear tree. Okay, that last one's mine, but by this stage it doesn't matter. Nobody yet knows who has "mobilized darkness and silence" but as Joan says, in her final monologue, "Everything's been recruited."

The end.

As I said, *Far Away* is a hot ticket. Big celebrities have been spotted, in their traditional undercoverwear of ostentatiously shabby dress, and, even at the performance I attended, there were faces in the audience who looked like they expected you to recognize them. That said, the non-celebrity clientele seemed indifferent. It felt a long fifty-three minutes: by comparison, a Robert Wilson all-nighter at BAM would have flown by. All the grand themes my fellow critics had been at pains to note—all the resonance, the echoes, the allusions that make this play so "disturbingly apposite" at a time of Washington saber rattling—seem to have left the paying customers cold.

As a dramatist, Miss Churchill is almost a textbook example of caviar to the general: her apparently indestructible footlight-socialist cachet rarely expands to the wider public, the one famous exception being *Serious Money*, her assault on Eighties "greed culture," wideboy Thatcherites, City traders, etc. In that case its success owed more to the audience than to the author: the fellows she was attacking adopted the play as a badge of pride, packed the stalls and had a ball. "She's right. We are bastards. Ain't life grand?" Then as now, she has an eye for a good subject. Her latest play, *A Number*, is already generating vast new quantities of buzz in London. "What's it about?" I asked a friend. "A man who has his son cloned," he said. Brilliant. Miss Churchill's problem, though, is an inability to go beyond the précis. Reviewers and Royal Court subscribers don't seem to mind, but sooner or later, usually not much longer than six weeks into the run, a more general audience notices.

Let us credit the New York critics with believing what they write—that this is an important work on a powerful theme of immediate relevance to Americans today. What then is it telling us? The First Act kiddie nightmare act, the Second Act hat-walk, the Third Act blow-out, what does it all add up to? Suppose you're not sure about all that Bush saber rattling, suppose your Lower Manhattan office had its windows shattered on September 11th: what illumination does Miss Churchill shed on the world?

Well, Act One is just about real, if you regard late Harold Pinter as still being just about moored to reality, even if only by his little toe and a long string. I wonder how the Master feels about this play: if it were authentic Pinter and not just Pinteresque, that quarter-hour of brooding on society's dark fascistic underbelly would be the whole thing. It's mildly insulting that Miss Churchill sees it merely as a little limbering up for more lurid horrors to come. But the point, if there is one, would seem to be that this is the seed of the poisonous fruit that

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will blossom later on. In seeking to reassure her niece, Harper has in her bland, smiling, soothing way implanted in the little girl an indifference to suffering, to torture, to her fellow man. And so in Act Two she's quite content to make hats for a grotesque ceremony that, according to the normally sensible chaps at *Entertainment Weekly*, "speaks volumes about cultures of violence and media distraction."

Then comes Act Three, and now the insidious corruption that began on that long-ago night when a child's sleep was disturbed is total: as Mr. Isherwood puts it in *Variety*, "the rot of human evil has spread to the animal and mineral worlds"—not to mention miscellaneous inanimate objects. "A world in which everyday objects—pins, hairspray—have taken on murderous abilities is hardly easy to dismiss in our unsettled age, in which opening an envelope has become a possibly fatal act."

But an envelope can't kill you—not unless someone has put something in it, and, when a fellow goes to that much trouble, usually it's for a reason. The problem with the Pinter view of the world is that fascism is not a general affliction: there are particular conditions which explain why it took in Romania, say, and not Britain. Men do not brutalize others systematically without a reason. Some of those reasons can be pretty unattractive—they're Jews, they're Kurds—but they are reasons nonetheless; they're not completely arbitrary. To suggest there are none or that they don't matter is a lie, or, more politely, a moral cop-out. I've spent the last year mocking dopey lefties droning on about "root causes," but Miss Churchill is even sillier. There are no causes, root or otherwise. That opening scene—in which uncle is observed clubbing innocent children in the yard in the small hours—is the play's first evasion. How in its vapid generality can it possibly speak to the real, precise, explicit violence of September 11 or Bali?

"Act" Two is even sillier. The *Times*' man says the wordless hat parade "is probably the most astonishing coup de théâtre you'll see this season." Maybe. Everyone agrees it's a powerful stage image, but very few seem exercised by what it's meant to be an image of. "Cultures of violence and media distraction"? That would be us. Presumably Fox's Z-list celebrity wrestling night—Tonya Harding vs. Paula Jones—is but one step away from forcing large numbers of people to tap-dance into the gas chambers. But right now "cultures of violence" seem strongest in countries sorely lacking in "media distraction." Take that notion of creating a beautiful hat that will be worn only once and then destroyed with its wearer. That has a blurry echo of Afghanistan under the Taliban, a country where people lived for the most part in crude dwellings but where the local contractors were hired to construct new walls for the express purpose of collapsing on accused homosexuals. You build a terrific wall, just so the mullahs can bury some hapless sodomite with it: there could hardly be a better example of radical Islamism's waste of human energy.

Or consider the recent Miss World competition, which had to flee Nigeria because a chance remark led to riots in which hundreds died—over a swimsuit pageant. That's more surreal than Miss Churchill's coup de théâtre, and as bizarre a confrontation between western media distraction and Islamist violence as any dramatist could devise. But most dramatists wouldn't go anywhere near it, because it would involve confronting specifics, as Salman Rushdie has had to do. Taking the hat rack at the Royal Enclosure and sticking it on the heads of death-row inmates is a powerful stage picture precisely because it means nothing: it has been expressly designed to avoid meaning. This scene doesn't say anything about the "cultures of violence and media distraction" because it's too busy being a jolly clever example of it.

Which brings us to the big everything-plus-the-kitchen-sink-has-been-recruited finale, when the play's woozy generalities achieve the sublime. If you believe in "the rot of human evil," no doubt you believe it

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can contaminate everything else—deer, darkness, coffee, foxgloves. But a belief in "the rot of human evil" makes drama itself irrelevant. If you can journey in fifty-three minutes from some clubbings in the yard to execution spectacles to a planet engulfed in total war and all without character or context or motive, then our world is literally meaningless. Maybe it is. But, if that's all Caryl Churchill has to say, then why promote it as a searing incisive portrait that's all too frighteningly apposite for those of us allegedly shrinking under the elongated shadow of terrorism?

A decade ago, Miss Churchill wrote a play called *Mad Forest*, a portrait of post-Ceausescu Romania that addressed that blighted land shrewdly and honestly. Since then, you can't see the forest for the madness: everything she's done has got crazier and lazier. Even by her own standards, *Far Away* must set some sort of new record: a short trio of perfunctorily connected scenelets almost shrieking their meaninglessness only drives the critics to ever more frenzied efforts to invest them with insight and profundity. Totalitarianism is bad, spectacle is bad, war is bad. Well, I never. I would figure on this play running out of audience any day now. But we should treasure it while we can as the most exquisite example this season of the theater industry's accidental conspiracy to drive itself into utter irrelevance.

Our Town is back in town, at the Booth in a Westport Country Playhouse revival directed by James Naughton, better known for his acting. If you're thinking, "Yawn. *Our Town*. Seen it a thousand times. Know it backwards," then this is the *Our Town* for you. If you don't already know the characters, the script, and the town, you'll get very little sense of them from this production. It stars Paul Newman, who abandoned the stage for film four decades ago and has now returned. Those who saw him way back when say he was a great stage actor. He's certainly a great film actor, wonderfully watchable in the itsybitsiest little nothing of a movie. And that's what he gives here: a great film performance. If you're in the front row or, better, squatting on the lip of the stage, I'll bet it's riveting, and almost as good as on the video. But, for anyone in the third row or behind, it simply doesn't connect, it's too muted, low-key, all close-ups: as Thornton Wilder's Stage Manager, Newman singularly fails to manage the stage.

The rest of the production is subversive in all the wrong ways. Wilder specified no scenery for the play, but they went and hired Tony Walton anyway and had to give him something to do. So, instead of the Wilder-mandated bare stage, he's designed a set of a bare stage, with painted-on radiators at the back. It's not a bare stage, but a "bare stage"—or, for those who think Wilder's bare stage was in quote marks all along, a "'bare stage.'" Whatever. It's something to think about as Newman's shuffling around looking for the camera.

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Art

Late style Anthony Caro

by Karen Wilkin

"Late style" is what is supposed to happen to gifted, long-lived artists. At best, it manifests itself as a bold expansion of ideas implicit in earlier work or as a reckless exploration of new possibilities. The most exciting late style works seem fearless, as if the maker's accumulated experience of thinking about, looking at, and making art over a long working life is so powerful that it obliterates all preconceptions of what a work of art could or should be. Think of Titian's or Rembrandt's roughly brushed, introspective, emotionally charged paintings of their last years, which thumb their noses at sixteenth- and seventeenth-century ideas about finish, "correctness," and touch. Think of Monet's flickering, elusive images of his lily pond or the Japanese bridge that spanned it, which reinvent landscape painting as a dense fabric of overscaled brushstrokes and disorienting space. Or Matisse's rigorously simplified, deceptively casual Vence interiors of the 1940s or his rapturous, deceptively economical *gouaches découpés* of his last decade, which summarize the preoccupations of his entire life as an artist in a fresh, wholly reconceived formal language.

The late style works of the *monstre sacré*, Picasso, can seem the efforts of an infuriated, prodigiously gifted child trying to exorcise demons—in this instance, age, a deteriorating body, and eventual death; at worst, they simply reprise as mannerisms things that were once formal imperatives. Hofmann's most radiant, energetic, generously scaled canvases were painted in the last years of his long life (he died at eighty-six), although it can be argued that his mature oeuvre is entirely made up of late style work, since he didn't start painting full time or with real consistency, good as many of his earlier pictures are, until he was well into his sixties. What links all of these historically and aesthetically diverse works is the sense that their authors knew so much and had done so much that they were unwilling to deny themselves anything or to please anyone but themselves. It's what the French call "*je m'en fou-isme*"—not give a damn-ism—which also translates (in relation to art) as defying convention in ways verging on the outrageous.

This fall, a group of concurrent international exhibitions made it official that Anthony Caro's name must be added to the list of late style masters, as he approaches his seventy-ninth birthday this spring. (From what I've seen during a friendship of almost thirty years, Caro's work of the past decade or so has been characterized by the formal and conceptual adventurousness that is often a hallmark of late style, but the designation seemed premature, given his apparently unstoppable energy—not that he now appears to have slowed down at all.) In Barcelona *The Last Judgement* (1995–1999, Museum Würth, Kunzelsau) and in New York *The Barbarians* (1999–2002), both multi-part narrative—or at least, allusive—

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cycles, in steel, wood, and ceramic, offer testimony to some of Caro's current preoccupations, while "Anthony Caro: Drawing in Space, Sculptures From 1963 to 1988," also in Barcelona, sets the recent works in context with a thoughtful selection of earlier abstract sculptures.[1] The combination dramatized what is new in Caro's recent efforts and, at the same time, revealed their connection to his past.

While still in his early thirties, Caro's thickset, expressionist figures earned him recognition as one of Great Britain's most promising young sculptors, but he says that he felt that "the figure got in my way" when he made his first trip to the United States in 1959. On his return to England, stimulated by the American abstract art he had seen and excited by the improvisational approach of his U.S. colleagues, he began making the open, linear constructions in steel that soon established his international reputation, collaging industrial members, off-cuts, and other kinds of scrap in an updated version of the "new tradition" of Picasso and González, by way of David Smith. Caro's debt to this lineage was evident, but so were his individuality and inventiveness. His large, delicately poised sculptures occupied the viewer's space, unconfined by pedestal or plinth, like any other objects in the real world. But they demanded attention by resembling nothing but themselves, declaring their difference from ordinary things by apparently defying gravity, springing lightly from the ground and moving easily along it. When Caro began questioning notions of scale in the mid-sixties, he made weightlessness part of the drama and meaning of the resulting "table sculptures" by allowing them to plunge over the edge of their bases. The wordless expressive language of these remarkable early works resided in how things touched and in the likeness or unlikeness of both the shapes and placement of component elements, all of it—as in Matisse's paintings—tedious to itemize, but eloquently visible. (Caro says that Matisse's paintings have played an important role in his evolution as a sculptor, as has the work of many other painters—interestingly, not sculptors; at various times, he has taken his cue from remembered imagery gleaned from Picasso, Manet, Rubens, Van Gogh, and Duccio, among others.)

In the Barcelona show, Caro's early years were represented by painted works that demonstrated a restless young man's testing of the limits of extension, slenderness, and hovering—possibly even the limits of what sculpture itself could be. Chunks of I-beam tipped like dancers *en pointe*, tank ends and ploughshares described elegant trajectories, rectangles of metal mesh shifted from opaque to transparent as you moved, an impossibly thin bar of metal angled up, like a cobra rising to a snake charmer's tune, all of it disembodied by clear, bright color. (Not that the origins of Caro's elements ever obtrude; they are always subsumed by their sculptural context.) In the seductive *Garland* (1970, private collection), curving dark green shapes uncoiled horizontally, as though performing a sarabande, before a vertical rust-red grid that was at once window, picture, barrier, and simply contrasting drawing; the sculpture somehow embodied the pastoral tradition, Matisse's skewed idylls *La Bonheur de Vivre* or *Dance* included, yet remained completely self-sufficient.

If Caro had continued to mine this vein, his place in the history of modernist sculpture would still be assured, but by the mid-1970s he was growing impatient again. The

1 "Anthony Caro: Drawing in Space, Sculptures From 1963 to 1988" and "The Last Judgement" opened at the Centre Cultural Caixa Catalunya, Barcelona, on October 22, 2002 and remain on view until January 19, 2003. A catalogue of the exhibition has been published with texts by Enrique Juncosa and Anthony Caro, and an artist's interview by Pep Subiras (149 pages).

"Anthony Caro: The Barbarians" was on view at Mitchell-Innes and Nash, New York, from November 8 to December 20, 2002. A catalogue with text by Dave Hickey has been published by the gallery (64 pages, $30).

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result? Another alteration of his sculptural language, early evidence of a pattern of exploration and change that has marked his life as an artist. His early abstract sculptures, while greedy in their demands for space, were more or less human in size; now he tackled large sheets and slabs of unpainted steel, reveling in the richly inflected expanses and implacable frontality of new sheets and in the liquid edges of salvaged "crop"—the irregular ends of rolled steel. If Caro's earlier work has been called "line drawing in space," much of his sculpture after the mid-1970s could be described as "drawing in space in broad strokes with a loaded brush." Yet he always remained alert to the implications of the profiles and edges of even his most massive sculptures, often retranslating these boundaries back into line in more fragile constructions. And in the late 1980s, when he spent an extended period working in Barcelona, a city he described as being "all about drawing," the sculptures he made there and soon afterwards were notably linear, in part in response to the Catalan tradition of ironwork—at times literally, since some incorporated (and wholly transformed) abandoned pieces of balconies and railings—and in part as oblique homage to Caro's Catalan predecessor, the pioneer modernist sculptor and master metalworker González.

A different aspect of the Catalan legacy informed the retrospective portion of "Anthony Caro: Drawing in Space." Organized as part of the centennial celebration of Gaudí's birth, it was installed in one of the visionary Barcelona architect's most celebrated buildings, the Casa Milà, also known as La Pedrera—the one with the wild, biomorphic chimneys sprouting from the roof. The galleries are essentially a single, meandering, soft-edged space, once the lavish apartment of the building's owner, studded with massive stone columns at disconcerting angles; the ceiling is unpredictably inflected and immense windows with undulating frames provide glimpses of extravagant wrought-iron balconies. It's an indication of the power of Caro's work that it stands up to this setting. At times, it seemed that the sculpture and Gaudí's interior entered into an imperfectly translated conversation that risked turning into an argument, but in the end, the two complemented each other in unexpected ways. Caro's most severely pared-down works seemed to diagram the fluid space they occupied, while more sensual pieces, such as the Tate Gallery's superb *Tundra* (1975), a wall of rippling steel punctuated by casual verticals, seemed to play off of Gaudí's swells and pulses; a pair of works made in Barcelona distilled the city's ubiquitous ironwork into essential arcs and whorls, wrenching the sometimes arbitrary flourishes of balconies and street furniture away from utility and symmetry, and transforming them into evocative abstractness.

All of the sculptures on view seemed more place than object. (This was true even of the table-based works). Whether constructed of minimally linear elements or relatively substantial ones, they are all open, able to be penetrated by the eye, but elusive. The viewer is held at bay—there is never any temptation to cross the boundaries of even the largest work—and invited to read each work incrementally. You acknowledge the wordless rhymes and dissonances of Caro's structures and sense the powerful interconnectedness of elements, even across considerable distance, but, at the same time, you remain as aware of the space between parts as of the parts themselves; at times, it seemed that only sheer visual intelligence held the sculptures together. Yet since the late 1980s, Caro has been increasingly preoccupied by enclosure, mass, and volume, exploring these ideas in constructions that could literally be entered. The pivotal work of this kind is an enormous tower containing narrow stairs, made in 1991. Compelling to move through (although admittedly less compelling from the outside), it led to an on-going series of large-scale works that are among his most potent to date. They range from massive, volumetric, often completely closed "object

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sculptures" to public-scale constructions that must be threaded through in order to experience them fully, the rhythm and route of your passage dictated by the structure and its intervals. Some of these enigmatic "object sculptures" can be seen into, usually through blocked or partial views; some require you to peer down into unenterable zones; some are so opaque that you must depend on memory as you move around them.

Because of the problematic load-bearing capacity of the Casa Milà's floors, none of these weighty works, the focus of a spectacular exhibition at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park earlier in 2002, were represented in Barcelona, but that did not wholly distort the exhibition's portrait of Caro's evolution. An interest in mass and "objectness" is only part of the broadened spectrum of his recent concerns. His growing fascination with closed volume has run parallel to an appetite for allusion, reference, and even narrative—notions once anathema to a forward-looking maker of open, linear, unyieldingly abstract constructions. Caro explains the shift as a natural development. His goal remains "to make sculpture real," which is to say to make things that are not facsimiles of anything else but embody discoveries and inventions of forms that carry deep feeling. But, he says, "abstraction is now so firmly established that it no longer has to be defended." Anything is possible. Nothing is immutable. "You have the sculptor's rules—you break them; you have your own rules—you break them," Caro says. "Rules are made first of all because you think that these are the edges, the limits, and then you question them."

Yet the changes evident in Caro's recent work suggest not only a questioning of his own assumptions but a response to changes in the world in which he lives. The earliest sculptures shown at the Casa Milà were made in the "swinging London" of the 1960s, in a moment of growing prosperity and optimism, by a young man exploring what seemed, then, to be unlimited possibilities. The most recent works in Caro's Barcelona show reflect the increasingly bleak mood of recent years, a terrifying world situation, and their maker's own intimations of mortality. Despite its title, *The Last Judgement* has nothing to do with the traditional separation of the saved and the damned, but instead is a somber meditation on this troubled century, embodied as a series of boxy, confessional- or shrine-like structures, a few extended laterally into confrontational "tableaux." The mood is ominous but non-specific. Caro's titles cut through time and cultures, adding to the ambiguity: "Charon," "Jacob's Ladder," "Judas," "Unknown Soldier," "Poison Chamber," "Civil War." The imagery is unstable. A few table-like structures, like ancient sites for sacrifice, hold piles of skull-like forms. Fragmented gates and grilles bar visual entrance to the "shrines"; forms retreat from sight; unclimbable stairs vanish into shadow. Recognizable allusions occupying a territory somewhere between Surrealism and the cartoon—flaring nostrils, a porcine snout, staring eyes—tug at your peripheral vision. Watchful heads, some human, some not, dislocated hands, and ungainly detached feet momentarily resolve themselves out of abstractness and then subside, like a sudden scream. You enter the precinct of these disturbing "boxes" through a rough-hewn "Bell Tower" of stacked railroad sleepers, to be confronted by an impenetrable "Door of Death." Only at the end, flanked by a quartet of trumpeting angels? monsters? at once torso and head, teetering on the edge of the grotesque, a "Gate of Heaven," slightly ajar, offers a hint of optimism. Among the "shrines" themselves, the only respite is the cool, classical "Elysian Fields."

For all its urgency and its disquieting allusions, the series is also about a kind of negotiated truce between unlikely materials: geometric lengths of wood, steel in various guises, and mysterious "punctuations" of clay. It's as if Caro forced them together to intensify their expressive qualities, carrying the collage tradition to an extreme in which

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the various components threaten to declare war on one another before settling into being parts of an uneasy whole. The undercurrent of autonomy in individual elements is not entirely fanciful. For some years, Caro has worked with the master ceramist Hans Spinner, in Grasse, first making apparently abstract stoneware "breads," which he says "wanted to be heads" when they arrived in his London studio. Responding to the character of the objects he himself had made, Caro gave full rein to their implicit associations in his recent works.

When *The Last Judgement* was first exhibited, at the 1999 Venice Biennale, it occupied the lofty, rectangular space of a former granary. Installed symmetrically in two rows, framed by "The Bell Tower," with the sacrificial tables down the center and the trumpeters and "Gate of Heaven" at the end, the cumulative effect was of a nave lined with altars. The ensemble dominated, although with time, individual works declared themselves. (I suspect that "Civil War" with its ruined cityscape, "Greed and Envy" with its compressed stair, and "Flesh" with its baroque flutter of steel, are among Caro's masterpieces, in any context; the literalness of "Salome Dances" remains problematic.) In Barcelona, space constraints and weight considerations dictated a U-shaped path, forcing you to confront each sculpture individually. In the relatively low-ceilinged, dark space, this transformed the sacred precinct of the Venice installation into a catacomb or prison and painful connections with coffins, cells, and torture chambers announced themselves. Post-September 11, the sculpture's elegiac tone seemed heightened.

By contrast, *The Barbarians* is antic in spirit. Six stiff life-sized mounted figures and a smaller-than-life ox-drawn cart converged on the viewer from opposite parts of the gallery. (This shift in size created a kind of forced perspective that made the horsemen placed in front of the cart seem to advance—no accident, given Caro's legendary mastery of scale.) As a group, *The Barbarians* is both scary and slightly comical. At first, their cobbled-together imagery dominated, so that you became involved in sketchily indicated earlaps, weapons, bridles, and helmet-heads (an homage to Caro's first mentor, Henry Moore?). You became engaged by the horses, each arching his neck differently, each perched on hooves ranging from the delicate to the brutal. You realized that these schematic mounts were gymnastic vaulting horses, elegantly covered in suede. (The series had its immediate origins when Caro found the horses in a London junk shop, although the resulting sculptures clearly tap into long-standing obsessions.) Then a wealth of associations kicked in: with archaic votive figures, rigidly alert African sculptures of horsemen, that haunting life-sized Chinese ceramic army, crude farm carts, and more.

But soon the way these puzzling sculptures were put together, in purely sculptural terms, made everything else seem almost irrelevant. Their insistent frontality, their four-square framing and stacking, their symmetry, their boxiness, and above all, their *madeness* became overwhelmingly important; so did the texture and individual character of each clay and wood component. For all its subtlety and nuanced sculptural sophistication, *The Barbarians* also began to seem primal, as if you were witnessing the invention of sculpture, as if Caro were the first person to have ever combined an assortment of unrelated things—lengths of thick wood, chunks of ceramic, twists of steel—to make, not a simulacrum, but a new, independent object with its own authority and life. Then imagery reasserted itself and *The Barbarians* became increasingly unnerving. It began to echo the chimerical heads in the "shrines" of *The Last Judgement*, as if the vaguely sinister creatures who threatened to escape from Caro's geometric "containers" had ridden to the city and entered the gates. And yet, there was still something playful about the sculptures. The ambiguity of Caro's riders is encapsulated by two poems quoted in *The Barbarians*' handsome, beautifully photo-

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graphed catalogue. In *The Age of Anxiety*, Auden describes the defeat of "peripheral people . . . stocky on horses," who came "out of the north, from black tundras." "They fell, they bled, not an eye was left open; all disappeared." In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Cavafy tells of anticipation and disappointment:

> because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come. And some who have just returned from the border say there are no barbarians any longer.
>
> And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution.

A more specific question was provoked by these fierce, deliberately "primitive" figures. Do they mark a departure for Caro, a retreat from abstraction? Yes and no. Like the richly narrative *Last Judgement*, they bear witness not to new concerns but rather to unfinished business, to a simultaneous exploration of a path not taken and an extension of one followed (along with many side routes) until the present. Caro seems to be revisiting the expressionist figuration he abandoned when he began to work in steel, reinventing the figure, this time not in terms of modeled form but in an abstract language of additive construction. Like all of Caro's sculptures since 1960, the character and meaning of both *The Barbarians* and *The Last Judgement* are inextricable from the process of addition, from the assembly of related and unrelated parts. The artist's will, hand, and determination to make the incompatible coexist are as important to these sculptures—if not more important—as their evocation of the recognizable. So, too, as with all of Caro's sculpture is how things touch, are spaced, and are placed.

In yet another way these sculptures continue an idea traceable through Caro's work, from first to last, despite his protean shifts in emphasis and his apparently endless ability to invent. He describes his earliest expressionist sculptures as being "about what it was like to be inside the body," and although he abandoned explicit imagery when he began to work in steel, the sensation of inhabiting a body remains implicit in even his most abstract work. Caro's sculptures always demand to be experienced kinesthetically; you measure them against your own body and mentally recapitulate their spatial articulation as movement. Caro says that he wants people to grasp his work "in a physical way, to relate to it with their bodies. . . . It is as if the eyes become a surrogate for the body." In the last decade, he has explored an increasingly wide range of ways of implicating the body in his sculptures, making the interiors (whether seen or unseen) of some as present as exteriors, compelling you to enter others, and in still others, returning and challenging your gaze. "In one way or another, physicality has to be part of sculpture," he says. "Looking is physical." Caro's "late style" work may be his most physical to date. Fortunately, since there is no slackening in either his energy or his ambition, there's almost certainly more to come.

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Music

New York chronicle

by Jay Nordlinger

Now and then, a critic will experience a performance so bad that he hesitates to report on it. He may even question himself: *Could it have been as bad as all that? But these are professional musicians, and everyone seems to like it. Listen to that applause!* And the answer, sadly, is yes: It could have been that bad.

I thought of this while attending a chamber-music concert at Alice Tully Hall, featuring Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, violin, and Anne-Marie McDermott, piano. I know what you're thinking, or may be thinking: This critic must be one in a huge army of Nadja-bashers. That's a good guess, but it happens not to be true. It is certainly true that Salerno-Sonnenberg has probably received as bad a musical press as anyone over the last fifteen years or so. She is repeatedly condemned as overly Romantic, self-indulgent, emotional, and unrestrained. She is also twitted for her physical movements in performance. I have not joined this chorus of abuse (much). I have found a great deal of musical worth in her, including in her Bach, which is far too Romantic for some, but which I have considered moving and legitimate. In fact, some of us think that Salerno-Sonnenberg has been spooked by critical attacks and that this has harmed or skewed her career. I will say again that I am not an ingrained Nadja-basher.

But this outing at Alice Tully was alarming; it was truly astonishing; and it was at least as much the fault of the pianist as it was of the violinist. The opening piece on the concert was one of Beethoven's greatest sonatas for piano and violin, that in C minor, op. 30, no. 2. Anne-Marie McDermott missed the opening figure, which was not a good omen. When Salerno-Sonnenberg came in, the tempo was switched—that was a second bad omen. Neither woman adhered to the written rhythm of the piece. McDermott, for example, got the dotted rhythms completely wrong, turning sixteenth notes into thirty-second notes, and even threatening sixty-fourths.

But the main problem was that the playing was unbelievably aggressive and rough. McDermott simply pounded and pounded. She appeared to be trying to break the piano. Salerno-Sonnenberg, for her part, appeared to be trying to break her violin. It occurred to me that this violinist, already on the wild side, does not need a recital partner who is even more wild. In the Adagio, McDermott exhibited no singing tone, and her accents were incredibly harsh. Salerno-Sonnenberg's choices in dynamics were extremely odd, beyond individualistic. In the Scherzo, McDermott actually attacked the pedal with her foot—kept stomping on it, as though trying to kill a rat. And Salerno-Sonnenberg stamped her foot on the stage, making for a vulgar pas de deux. The final Allegro including more stamping, and stomping, and rushing, and ridiculous attacks.

Beethoven was absent from this perform-

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ance; there was no sense of him, anywhere. This was, I'm afraid, loony-bin stuff.

As I say, one hesitates to report this kind of thing. Many people like their music criticism—or any kind of criticism—mild. Mild and safe. To raise no eyebrows, it is best to be either mildly disapproving or mildly approving. Any categorical disapproval or effusive praise is seen as suspect. To switch to the common football metaphor, many like their criticism between the forty-yard lines; not between, say, the tens.

The problem is, the real world—certainly the real musical world—is not like that. And honesty demands a correct telling. There are indeed a good number of routine, unremarkable, middle-of-the-road performances, but there is a great deal of very good and very bad. There are evenings of sheer brilliance, and evenings of disaster.

In this same period, there were two violin recitals that should live in the memory of everyone in attendance: one by Maxim Vengerov, the young Russian, and one by Hilary Hahn, the young (very young) American. I have stressed the age of these performers, but, really, that is ill advised. Vengerov is twenty-eight; Hahn is twenty-two. These data are almost irrelevant. In music, we tend to make too much of age, forgetting that musical maturity can set in early—indeed, almost immediately—and that a career is not necessarily a constantly upward trajectory, although we always hope for growth. To put it a little crudely: Either you got it or you don't. And this can be manifest cruelly early.

Vengerov showed up at Carnegie Hall with his violin only—no piano, no accompanist. As he explained to the audience, he was trying to revive the spirit of the early Italians—Corelli, Tartini—and also of the great Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931), who wrote no fewer than six (unaccompanied) sonatas for violin, each intended for, and dedicated to, a noted and cherished colleague. Among these were Fritz Kreisler, Josef Szigeti, George Enescu, and Jacques Thibaud. Vengerov played three of these sonatas, and he did so magnificently. He is a natural and adaptable musician, with a technique almost superhuman. Ysaÿe once said of his friend Szigeti, "I found in him that rare combination of the musician and the virtuoso." The same is true of Vengerov.

Among the other unaccompanied music he played were Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, in a new transcription by Bruce Fox-Lefriche, and a sonata written by Rodion Shchedrin, the Russian composer, for the 300th anniversary of Bach's birth in 1985. The Toccata and Fugue, of course, is one of the most transcribed pieces of all time; there must be versions for harmonica; the most famous (or notorious) of all, of course, is Stokowski's for symphony orchestra. And the Shchedrin is written with the technique, innovation, and inspiration of Bach in mind. Vengerov recounted that he learned and memorized that piece at age ten, to play for the composer. Shchedrin must have been impressed. Vengerov has never stopped impressing those in the field, as well as audiences generally. And he is the very definition of musical charisma, as this strange, glorious, intangible quality simply pours out of him, in everything he tries. This is not a matter of ego, either; it is more a matter of kinship with music, and an unbounded love of it.

Hilary Hahn is a different musician—cooler—but she is equally impressive in her way. Everyone says, sort of pro forma, that she is "maturing," or "coming along nicely." I must dispute this; we are poised to say it, but it does not comport, in my view, with the reality. She practically *emerged* full-blown, and she is extraordinary now. Her performance of the Shostakovich Concerto No. 1 with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra last February was one of the highlights of the entire season. She is all-capable, and she understands that the purpose of a performance is to serve the composer and his score. She leaves room for individuality, of course, but she does not permit unwanted self to cover the music, and, when one hears her, one feels that one has heard

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music unadulterated. In other words, one can easily look past the violinist and see the very heart of the music being presented.

A critic recently wrote of her, "Part of Ms. Hahn's talent is to make the difficult sound easy, even unspectacular. [In a particular piece] she offered every nuance, every dynamic in the range with ease, yet in serving the music well she didn't always make it fully her own. There's still a sense of obedience in her playing, a sense of excelling at the rules." This was intended as negative criticism, mind you. In truth, the music is *not* fully the performer's own. If the performer desires music of his own, he can trot down to the music shop, buy some manuscript paper, and commence to compose. Otherwise, one had better respect what springs from, and belongs to, the composer. And, as for obeying and excelling at the rules: May Hilary Hahn always. And may all others follow suit.

Back, now, to that chamber-music concert in Alice Tully Hall. This was a presentation of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and the Beethoven sonata was only the first item on the program. What followed was the Sextet for Clarinet, Horn, Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano written by the Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki in 2000. In this piece, Penderecki proves, as he has before, that he can do a lot with a motive or two: He knows how to make the most out of repetition. The sextet is intelligently crafted, featuring a nice interplay among the instruments. And the Chamber Music Society players were typically deft, led by the clarinetist David Shifrin. The Larghetto movement seems like a cello concerto at times, with the veteran cellist Fred Sherry doing an admirable job. The horn playing of William Purvis, too, was first-rate. And the harshness and bluntness of Anne-Marie McDermott at the piano was less ruinous here.

The second half of the program was given over to the Dvořák Piano Quintet, a composition beloved by me, and by many others. Salerno-Sonnenberg was to return, and her partner was to remain at the piano. I must confess that I did not have the heart to stay and hear it, having heard enough.

Some of us are wondering, Is Alicia de Larrocha done for good? The great pianist's appearance at Carnegie Hall on November 25 was billed as her "farewell" to that hall—to that hall only. Yet she has no more concerts scheduled, anywhere. So, is this it—is that all she wrote? De Larrocha has always been one of the most persistent, indefatigable, and, indeed, peripatetic of performers. She has been constantly on the road. Her main address is a thousand hotel rooms. James Brown is called "the hardest-working man in show business." For decades, de Larrocha has been about the hardest-working person in classical music.

She was born in 1923, the brightest musical light in Barcelona (along, one should say, with her friend and sometime recital partner, the soprano Victoria de los Angeles). In fact, her final appearance, if there has to be one, should probably take place in her native city. In the 1960s she burst onto the American scene like a spray of fireworks. She made us all familiar with Spanish music—Albéniz, Granados, Turina, and many others—and was prized for her Mozart (doing much, for example, to establish the Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center). But de Larrocha could play anything. She was devoted to Bach; her Beethoven was authoritative; her Schumann was formidable (Romantic yet very disciplined). I remember an incandescent set of Rachmaninoff preludes at one recital. And her recording of that composer's fearsome Third Concerto, with André Previn conducting, is superb. In all, when she was at her best, de Larrocha was a model of piano playing: incisive, correct, no-nonsense, clear, full of rhythm, smart, dazzling.

It's hard to believe that she is going. I should say, however, that I have had concerns about her in recent years. Two seasons ago, she played an all-Spanish recital in Alice Tully Hall. Afterward, I resolved not to hear her again, preferring to remember her as she was.

But what critic could fail to be present on

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the 25th, to hear this "Carnegie Hall farewell"? This was not a piano recital. De Larrocha played Mozart's little A-major concerto, K. 414, with the Tokyo String Quartet—in, of course, a string-quartet arrangement. If this was indeed her farewell, to the music world generally, then it was a modest one, in keeping with de Larrocha's character. Her appearance was the middle insert in someone else's concert—in an otherwise normal Tokyo String Quartet concert.

She enters a stage the same way she always has, eyes cast down, humble, almost apologetic. She looks the same too, although she seems shorter than ever (she started under five feet), and her hair is white rather than jet-Spanish-black, and she uses glasses while at the keyboard. When she begins to play, she is immediately de Larrocha—her sound and approach are instantly recognizable. Yet, like most true musicians, she never plays a piece exactly the same way twice. She once confided that she never listens to any of her recordings: A recorded performance is just a snapshot in time, and she would never play the piece in question the same way again.

In her later years, the fingers have been a little sluggish. She does not execute a turn, for example, quite as crisply as before. But in the Mozart, she demonstrated her usual clarity. She was a bit thumping and blunt in the Andante, but that, too, has been a de Larrocha trait. And in the final movement—Allegretto—she had her typical flow and sensibility, a kind of choppy fluidity (to indulge in a necessary oxymoron), along with that rhythmic excellence. De Larrocha's Mozart is now permanent in our ears: the way she plays an Alberti bass, for instance (sort of detached yet even). She has always understood Mozart and imparted his spirit. Her musical intelligence has served him well—and everyone well.

When it was over, de Larrocha refused to take a bow without her quartet members. A giant, this little woman.

The rest of the concert, too, was a treat, for the Tokyo String Quartet is in very fine shape. There is a lightness, a buoyancy, and a transparency about their playing. They began the evening with the String Quartet in E-flat, D. 87, by Schubert, which was beautiful and rather streamlined. The Tokyo's legato was exemplary. We could hear, in this performance, that Schubert was a master of song, and, in parts, the playing was quite Classical and Mozartean as well. The members of this quartet play together, in true ensembleship, having no "stars," each member self-effacing but self-assured.

Schubert's Scherzo was spunky and characterful—also very precise. The Adagio was perfectly composed and balanced. The Allegro had a shimmering vigor.

After intermission—and after Alicia de Larrocha had bidden farewell—the Tokyo played Beethoven's String Quartet in F, op. 59, no. 1—one of the "Razumovskys." Again, there was that lightness, transparency, and beauty. The first movement was tender and sweet (words not usually associated with Beethoven). Each part was exceptionally clear, and each locked in nicely with the others. The second movement (Allegretto) was subtle, refined, and neatly stenciled. The third movement—Adagio molto e mesto—featured a ravishing cello solo by Clive Greensmith. And in the fourth movement—Thème russe: Allegro—the folk aspects were jolly, but not obtrusive.

One was left with the impression of taste and civilization.

We should close with a little opera—a lot of opera, really, as *Aida* is definitionally grand. The Metropolitan Opera's current conception of *Aida*—which was unveiled in 1988—is one of the great visual pleasures in all of opera. In a recent "chronicle," I said just this about the Met's *Turandot*, fashioned by Franco Zeffirelli. Well, the same is true of this *Aida*, produced by Sonja Frisell. The sets are almost impossibly monumental; the choreography is consistently interesting; the costumes and the sheer objects on the stage are all glorious to look at. We do not get elephants, but there are horses—close enough.

Is *Aida* a spectacle? Yeah, but so what? It

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also contains some of the best music Verdi ever composed.

The cast I will now discuss is perhaps not the most anticipated of the Met's 2002–2003 season. Later, we will have Deborah Voigt as Aida and either Larissa Diadkova or Dolora Zajick as Amneris. Diadkova, for her part, has already delivered a stunning Azucena in the Met's *Trovatore*, revealing a gorgeous voice, consummate vocal command, and a better-than-opera, theater-like ability to act.

But this *Aida* was nothing to sneer at. In the title role, it had Michele Crider, who is known for this part, and also for Cio-Cio San (*Madama Butterfly*). Crider has a big, big voice, and it is at times unwieldy. It is also subject to some stridency. But as I was listening to her, I was reminded that beauty and control are not everything in opera—and operatic singing must at times be separated from singing in general. Crider brought to "Ritorna vincitor" a biting characterization, an unusual desperation: The aria wasn't pretty, but it was right. We are not dealing in Schubert. And in the great Act II, with all those voices, and all that chorus, and all that orchestra, Crider could be heard soaring over, and cutting through, everything: an asset.

Speaking of big voices, the Canadian tenor Richard Margison took the part of Radames. He also sings Otello and Florestan (*Fidelio*). This is not only a voice of the size and sturdiness those parts suggest, it is a beautiful and extraordinary one. Its owner had some problems, however, particularly at the beginning of *Aida*, where Radames must really shine. This is the moment for "Celeste Aida." Margison engaged in some vulgar vocal sliding, and he and the conductor, Marco Armiliato, could not agree on tempos. (There were about five in the course of this aria.) The tenor's high B flat was sort of strangled. There was nothing dreamy about this account: It was merely gotten through. But Margison settled down and acquitted himself with honor. With that voice—he can more or less write his own professional ticket.

Taking Amneris was the Russian mezzo-soprano Irina Mishura, who is also an Azucena and an Adalgisa (*Norma*). (The letter A is extremely important for operatic mezzos.) Mishura had some trouble with pitch, and she was not terribly nuanced. Particularly in the early going, she suffered from some wobbles. And this is a very, very Russian Egyptian princess—one had to remind oneself that one wasn't listening to Mussorgsky. But Mishura handled herself imperially and imperiously, and she does extremely well with the resources she has. She is a woman of the operatic theater, and her Amneris is exciting.

The veteran Matti Salminen was a truck driver of a Ramfis, booming out that famous voice. Raymond Aceto was a solid King. And Yalun Zhang was Amonasro, offering lousy Italian but a rich, even inspiring, baritone.

One goes to an *Aida*—even a Met *Aida*—with some reluctance and weariness: Again? This bloated old thing? And yet Verdi delivers, over and over. So does this company. Big opera, big sets, big voices. Ain't opera—or at least *Aida*—grand?

Concert notes

The San Francisco Opera has always prided itself on being the second major opera company in the United States, though in recent years it has been challenged by the Chicago Lyric (especially when Ardis Krainik ran the company), and even by the Houston Grand Opera. Housed in what is the finest large opera house in the country, with a welcoming, spacious, and acoustically rewarding hall and generous public spaces, the San Francisco Opera has sailed through the decades with elegance, confident in its status and responsive to its loyal patrons. Founded by Gaetano Merola in 1923, the company achieved artistic prominence under the strongly guided stewardship of Kurt Herbert Adler, whose partner on the board for many years was the

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equally strong Robert Watt Miller. Adler managed to attract the leading singers from Europe and the United States (many before their Met careers) and combined operatic rarities with flat-out singing evenings to keep the company in the forefront of opera news. In the history of opera in America, Kurt Herbert Adler looms large.

He was succeeded by Terence McEwan, a recording executive with a passion for operatic voices, under whose direction the company became more attuned to vocalism as a prime requirement for performance. But McEwan was more than a canary-fancier, and he realized that the company needed more than great voices in full cry—especially since, during his tenure, the supply of great singers from abroad was beginning to thin out. He commissioned a rigorous modernist American composer, Hugo Weisgall, to write a major work that he intended to be his contribution to the opera of today. Unfortunately, McEwan's health forced an early retirement, and his successor, Lofti Mansouri, cancelled the commission. The work that survived, *Esther*, heard only twice in a constricted production at the New York City Opera, would have shown to far better artistic advantage in San Francisco than Mansouri's own two commissions: André Previn's *Streetcar Named Desire* and Jake Heggie's *Dead Man Walking*. In general, the more traditional nature of the San Francisco repertory was continued by Mansouri, who attempted to further the "great voices" program in an era when those voices were in shorter and shorter supply. I remember a production of Donizetti's musty late opera *La Favorite*—in all respects it could have been staged exactly the same way in 1923—that was given a rapturous welcome by at least one local critic.

The Board obviously felt that it was time for an artistic change, but when Mansouri retired it broke with tradition with a vengeance. The Board appointed Pamela Rosenberg, who, though born in California, had spent her entire professional life in the opera houses of Germany (Frankfurt, Stuttgart, and Hamburg) and the Netherlands. Her appointment by one of the leading "singing" opera houses raised many eyebrows, and it was conjectured that she would bring dramatic change to the house.

Change of course came, with Rosenberg planning the next few opera seasons along thematic lines (e.g., Seminal Works of Modern Times; Women Outside of Society; The Faust Project; Outsiders and Pioneers?; The Nature of the Human Condition). The 2002–2003 season is the first to be programmed by her.

As her first major statement, and as the first of her Seminal Works of Modern Times, Rosenberg chose Olivier Messiaen's only opera, *Saint François d'Assise*. Since its premier in Paris in 1983, this eight-scene work has achieved iconic status, although it has been produced only a few times, owing to its orchestral and vocal demands. Messiaen's immersion in a Catholicism of rapture and in his beloved world of birds and nature resulted, over the years, in pieces of extraordinary color and exuberance, which were organized with such care that they were not mere fantasies, but could withstand dissection by such a stylistically rigorous composer as Pierre Boulez.

Messiaen, like Janáček, was an original with no followers. Like Janáček, Messiaen's work has been gaining in popularity since his death in 1992, perhaps because its spectacular sound serves as an anodyne to harsh realities.

The life of Saint Francis was of course an obvious choice, and the composer fashioned the eight scenes from aspects of the saint's life, leaving out awkward stagings (e.g., the wolf of Gubbio), but including the famous Bird Sermon, the receiving of the stigmata, and the kissing of the leper. There are two important solo roles, that of Francis (the longest bass-baritone role in the repertory) and of The Angel, with a key character part in the Leper and various Franciscan monks. Despite the static and oratorio-like aspect of the four-hour opera, Messiaen managed to endow his characters with individuality and allowed Francis to tower over them all.

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The cast is backed by a very large chorus and his usual monster orchestra, highlighted by three of Messiaen's beloved Ondes Martenot, a Theremin-like instrument that generates an unearthly pitched sound, used to spectacular effect in the scene where the Angel plays celestial music to the enraptured Francis.

Whether it is one of the *oeuvres-clef* of the twentieth century (as some have maintained) or merely a cultist's paradise (as, for instance, is Pfitzner's *Palestrina*), any production of *Saint Francis* becomes an Occasion. It is therefore a fitting piece to inaugurate a new artistic departure.

As appropriate as Rosenberg's courageous choice was, the performance I saw on October 17th was something of a disappointment, for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, Rosenberg chose a German director, Nicolas Brieger, who put us back in the clichéd world of the trenchcoat and the fedora. The mise-en-scène of Hans Dieter Schaal was largely in monochrome (in an opera of riotous orchestral color!), and the set—bombed-out fragments of buildings and windows with corrugated iron shutters—epitomized a Germanic Eurotrash declared dead and buried twenty years ago.

Several scenes were well done: that of the Leper (certainly one of the strongest in the opera); the first scene with the Angel, all in blue, disguised in fedora and knapsack (hiding her single wing); and the second with the Angel, in which she plays celestial music on a suspended circle of light in front of a full moon.

Neither Brieger nor anyone else whose production I have seen has been able to animate fully the Bird Sermon; it is interminable. I can't understand this, because birds and birdcalls were integral to Messiaen's life and to much of his music. I can only conjecture that, having written many compositions involving birdcalls, he was tapped out.

The stigmata scene, one of the finest in the score, was severely mishandled by Brieger. Willard White, a large, muscled man with a large, sonorous voice, who is one of the few singers willing and able to undertake this fearsome role, played Saint Francis. Brieger's decision to have Willard stripped to his waist and elevated on a large bar over the stage as he received the stigmata made him appear not the humble, gentle apostle to the sick and the poor, but rather some sort of Hercules confronting the Universe. Perhaps, in the German way, this was subtext made visible, but it was grossly inappropriate and faintly risible.

White himself projected a quick dignity and a solidity of presence in his long stretches onstage, but within that very fine performance there was an absence of spirituality. His Francis remained Antaeus—strongest when bound to the earth.

The other main deficiency of the production lay in Donald Runnicles's conducting. Though it had much of the requisite color, it lacked the rhythmic tension and inner energy to enliven and impel Messiaen's music, which can all too easily sag into a sort of viscous longueur. This was particularly true of the ecstatic ending of the opera—the transfiguration of Francis to Heaven—that dragged its weary way to a welcome close. Messiaen's opera may be a work worthy of production by every major opera company, but it is far from foolproof and requires a lot of special handling. The San Francisco Opera production only partly fulfilled the work's special needs.

Pamela Rosenberg, in her first years as General Director, has been hit hard by the aftermath of September 11, which left the company with a $7.7 million deficit last year, and difficult prospects this year. A great company like San Francisco's will survive, but it will be interesting to see how her thematic programs of the next years, and her penchant for the German style of operatic production, will play in a house that has always liked big voices and big, full-throated singing.

It is not too strong a statement to say that the Argentinean-Jewish composer Osvaldo Golijov, now resident in Boston, is the hottest young composer in the United States.

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This is primarily because one of his works, *La Pasión según San Marco*, part of a commission of four Gospel passions to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the death of J. S. Bach, was an instant success. He recast the story of Jesus's death through contemporary music—primarily the music of Latin-American countries—making the work vividly immediate. Audience responses have been enthusiastic, which is rare for new pieces in the "classical" repertory.

The 90-minute piece calls for specialized forces—a Latin-American band with extra Latin percussion instruments, ideally a Latin-American chorus (here, La Schola Cantorum de Caracas), combined with soloists, Latin-American dancers, and a reduced string section of violins, cellos, and two percussionists. Robert Spano, the American conductor who leads the Brooklyn Philharmonic, has been a champion of the work, which he has also conducted.

The performance that I saw at the Gilman Opera House of the Brooklyn Academy of Music on October 30 received its impetus from the strongly rhythmic vitality of Golijov's Latin score. As is common with many of these eclectic compositions (there are points of contact with, for example, the Nativity oratorio of John Adams, *El Niño*), the textual sources go well beyond the Gospel. They include other Biblical texts, the work of Spanish poets, and the Kaddish in Aramaic.

What we are given, then, is a Latino version of the betrayal, condemnation, and crucifixion of Christ, interspersed with pauses for reflection. Much of the propulsiveness of the piece—and its visceral attraction—comes from the rhythm-driven Latin influence; I found the result less representative of Golijov's best music-making, however, than his non-Spanish work. The Latino poundings have about them a generic off-the-radio flavor: quite well set forward but not very individual.

What Golijov knows, primarily, is musical and theatrical drama, and how to bring it out through subtleties of orchestration and text-setting. His handling of the chorus is splendid, as is his staging. Golijov showed his flair for tension-and-release theatricality in many ways: the short interludes of dances that punctuated the story; the poignant solo; a setting of a poem by Rosalia de Castro about Peter after he has thrice denied Christ; the silence of Christ before Pilate, represented by the varied rhythms of hand-clapping of the chorus; the festive joy of the crowd as it goes to Golgotha.

The drama is heightened further by Golijov's astute use of his soloists: a sort of Latino Gospel shouter (Raynaldo Gonzalez Fernandez), who was also a loose-limbed dancer; a Brazilian popular music singer, Luciana Souza, whose low mezzo *fado*-drenched voice emphasized sorrow and loss; and the pure-voiced Dawn Upshaw for celestiality.

This *Pasión* reminds me of Lee Breuer and Bob Telson's African-American-gospel-service setting of *The Gospel at Colonus*, which has a very similar direct audience appeal. Because of the specialized nature of its performing forces, I doubt this work will have a wide performing life. We will have to await Golijov's subsequent compositions to understand the scope of his undoubted musical and dramatic talent better.

—Patrick J. Smith

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The media

"Media bias" revisited

by James Bowman

Well, it was enough to make a cat laugh, as Mark Twain says. Normally, I don't like to write about "media bias." You can't have an argument with someone who doesn't argue in good faith, and those who deny the charge of bias are nearly always doing so in bad faith. The privileged position occupied by the media in the national debate depends absolutely on frequent and vehement official insistence on their neutrality and "objectivity"—even though these ritual and unbelievable assertions fly in the face of the obvious truth that *everyone* is biased except those who simply don't care. Apologists for "objectivity" acknowledge this fundamental truth on the one hand while insisting on the other on their "professional" qualification not to be affected by it, an absurd position. But if their refusal to see that the media are not just sometimes but *always* biased disqualifies them from having anything further to say of interest on the subject, it also means that they are not infrequently good for a laugh when the absurdities of their position are made manifest, or when they charge someone else with bias.

As a rule, the guardians of journalistic purity are too busy denying bias in themselves to be quite comfortable saying *tu quoque*. It might almost seem like a confirmation of their own bias to accuse someone else of it. Thus Tom Brokaw on the "Donahue" show last summer when asked about bias on the network news preferred to change the subject, replying: "I don't think it's a liberal agenda. It happens that journalism will always be spending more time on issues that seem to be liberal to some people; the problem of the downtrodden, the problem of civil rights and human rights, the problem of those people who don't have a place at the table with the powerful." But, Tom, as Phil Donahue did *not* say, how are we to regard this attempted *justification* of bias as a *denial* of bias? Isn't there a logical difficulty there? Isn't it just a little bit like the killer with the smoking gun in his hand who says: "I didn't do it, and, anyway, he had it coming"?

But the humor of Mr. Brokaw's remark was as nothing compared to that of various post-election charges of bias emanating from those who are usually loudest in their proclamations of journalistic objectivity. Needless to say, when *The New York Times* levels the charge of bias it is not against anyone whose biases are shared by *The New York Times*. Even other progressively disposed news organizations such as *The Washington Post* were shocked when the *Times* spiked the columns of two of its own sportswriters who did not toe the party line that Tiger Woods ought to boycott the Masters golf tournament because of the Augusta National Country Club's exclusion of women members. The news pages, happily, were otherwise in full agreement with the paper's editorial policy on the matter and ran over thirty stories in the space of a few weeks, all with the purpose of treating

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Augusta's decades old men-only rule as a newly revealed scandal. Thus the paper thought it newsworthy if not scandalous that CBS, broadcasters of the Masters, did not share their editorial opinion either, which may explain the outrage that led to the censoring of the authors of two signed columns.

In the end, the *Times* was embarrassed into reinstating the columns, though not before Gerald Boyd, the paper's managing editor, explained the decision to kill them in a memo to staff. "Part of our strict separation between the news and editorial pages entails not attacking each other," he wrote. "Intramural quarreling of that kind is unseemly and self-absorbed." Wouldn't you just know it? The *New York Times* finally comes out against self-absorption and it's on behalf of self-censorship and self-conceit! But the incident only illustrated what should have been clear in any case, which is that the official fiction of journalistic "objectivity" and high-mindedness has bred in the editorial staff of the *Times*—among other writers and editors—a bedrock conviction of their own infallibility.

Taken to task for the paper's excessive coverage of Augusta National's obstinately continuing to be Augusta National, Boyd replied that "We're writing about discrimination at one of the nation's most prestigious golf clubs and involving one of the world's most prominent tournaments. It's an important story, economically, socially, politically, gender-wise, racially. I don't know what it means to write too much about it." Perhaps he really doesn't. Perhaps *The New York Times* is so far insulated from competitive pressure that news judgment is by now entirely based on what the editors and writers want to publish (or think is "important") and not at all on what readers want to read, since even *New York Times* readers could hardly have failed to notice that they were being manipulated.

But Mr. Boyd's remarks also illustrate the extent to which, for such people, there are rarely any questions of biases to one side or the other because there only is one side: the side of decency and morality. And this attitude seeps more and more into political reporting and commentary, which will eventually all sound like the columns of Paul Krugman of the *Times*'s op ed page: so firmly persuaded of the soundness of their own judgment that honest political disagreement on any but trivial matters is impossible. On all the things that Krugman cares about, politics has been banished. Instead there is only right and wrong, truth and lies, decency and venality, good and evil. Obviously, similar assumptions are to be found elsewhere at the *Times*, which is what makes it particularly noteworthy when the *Times* is moved to level the charge not of error but of bias against others.

It happened in November when Bob Woodward's new book, *Bush at War*, revealed a supposedly "controversial" memo from Roger Ailes, head of the Fox News Channel, sent to President Bush in the aftermath of the terror attacks of September 11, 2001. Though the memo's contents remain unknown to anyone besides its author and recipient, the mere fact of his having sent it was considered by some of the guardians of the media's vaunted "objectivity" as fatally compromising to Fox News. "Mr. Ailes's action seems especially hypocritical for someone who has spent years trumpeting the fairness of Fox and the partisanship of just about everybody else in the news business," clucked *The New York Times*'s editorial a propos of his "misstep." "Fox's promotional slogan is: 'We report. You decide.' But the news channel has a Republican tilt and a conservative agenda."

Such high-mindedness would naturally be impossible for it if the *Times* were ever to admit what is obvious to the meanest intelligence, namely its own Democratic tilt and liberal agenda—which tells you something about why no one at the paper ever will admit it. So long as apologists for the media consensus can continue to insist, in the teeth of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that *their* media, the part of it that is biased towards them—which includes all

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the major networks and nearly all major newspapers in the country—is "objective" and therefore not biased, they have in their own minds a kind of authority that simply could not survive any acknowledgment of their bias. If they were just partisans like everybody else, they couldn't pretend to speak with the same sense of self-importance that they have from this conceit of their own objectivity.

But how, I wonder, does the editorial writer distinguish in his own mind between Mr. Ailes's private tender of advice to the President (if that is what it was) and its own public advice, of quite a different tendency no doubt, offered up every day in those very columns? It's not as if the memo was being presented to the public as news, like the story of CBS's obstinate refusal to refrain from broadcasting the Masters golf tournament in spite of the outcry from, er, *The New York Times*. As *The Wall Street Journal*'s answering editorial recognized: "We can't recall hearing similar press outrage, for example, when Rick Kaplan, former head of Fox News rival CNN, slept over at the [Clinton] White House."

The *Journal* went on to note that "the Ailes letter has also been a chance for the also-rans to whack their leading competitor. Fox News now beats CNN in prime time, even though CNN is carried in far more markets. Mr. Kaplan's former network has flogged the Ailes story so hard that he soon may get more air time than CNN gave the sniper, or Robert Blake." This might seem to make it more to the *Times*'s credit that it didn't kill the story by Alex S. Jones that appeared slightly later headed: "Fox News Moves From the Margins to the Mainstream." But the credit for this largely favorable report on Fox may not be so great as it might otherwise have been because the point of it was partly to establish the power of Fox News as a way of obliquely confirming Al Gore's remarkable charge, in an interview with *The New York Observer*, "that there are some major institutional voices that are, truthfully speaking, part and parcel of the Republican Party."

The first on Gore's list of these "institutional voices"—along with *The Washington Times* and Rush Limbaugh—was the Fox News Channel, and Jones appears to confirm this judgment when he writes: "Like it or not, Fox has become the establishment, with critics now bemoaning not just what they say is its bias but its dominating influence." These "critics" included Paul Krugman and E. J. Dionne, his counterpart on *The Washington Post* op ed page, who are at least as much "part and parcel" of the Democratic Party as any of those at whom they pointed the finger of scandal are of the Republican Party. But other liberals have actually learned to like the "bias" of the right. The former *New York Times* columnist Leslie H. Gelb, for example, now president of the Council on Foreign Relations, was quoted by Mr. Jones as saying that he "now considers Fox News Channel often to be a more reliable news source for international reporting than CNN or the nightly network news."

According to Mr. Gelb, Mr. Ailes's network presents a "'fairer picture, a fuller version of the different parts of the arguments' over world affairs." And, Jones adds, "a lot of other people who do not fit comfortably into the right-wing stereotype of Fox viewers apparently agree." That he would never have dreamed of referring to the "left-wing stereotype" of readers of *The New York Times* suggests that "bias" can only go one way, and this is borne out a little further down in the article when he notes that "Mr. Gelb said he makes a distinction between Fox's news coverage and its opinion programs, like 'The O'Reilly Factor,' which he considers biased. But even here, he finds himself drawn to Fox. 'CNN's commentary tends to be less biased and less interesting,' he said." An interesting concept, that of "biased" commentary. We have at least some conception of what unbiased reporting might look like, but what would unbiased *commentary* look like? Isn't the whole point of commentary to take up a bias, a particular direction of thought that you think is better than others, and try to defend it? If

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someone on the left does that, it's not bias; if someone on the right does, it is.

Once again, the point is that what the right sees as "bias" is to the left just decency and common sense, which is part of what makes them so furious when the charge of bias is leveled against them. When Claire Shipman on ABC's "This Week" told George Stephanopoulos that the manner in which the administration's changes to air pollution limits on industry were announced indicated that they were ashamed of what they had done, George Will offered an alternative explanation. An attempt to play down the significance of a partial relaxation of regulations on industry for economic reasons was not a sign of shame but of the fact that "the media is in league with the professional hysterics in the environmental movement who have a financial—let's put it on the table—a financial investment in saying the sky is falling." Miss Shipman rejected this argument out of hand. "You can't just blame this on us. There are Republican Governors who are very critical in the Northeast of what the administration is doing. That's not the media fault."

In short, there cannot be two opinions about something like air pollution. In Miss Shipman's view it has become depoliticized. For her there are no complex arguments about economic tradeoffs, only the stark choice of being against it, like the good people, or for it, like conservative Republicans. In the same way, when Andy Rooney appeared on Phil Donahue's show and, to the astonishment of the host, cheerfully confirmed the truth of Bernard Goldberg's argument in *Bias* that, as Rooney put it, "most news people I know tend towards the liberal direction," here is how Donahue answered him: "I think that most of the media think that homosexuals are people entitled to all the rights and the privileges in the Constitution. I believe that liberals, most liberals, are for choice in the matter of a woman's reproductive capacity. If that's liberal, yeah, I think we're liberal."

But of course he has just said he *doesn't* think he and others in the media who share his views are liberal. "Liberal" is a political term and, for him, abortion and homosexuality are two matters that stand outside of politics, just as air pollution does for Claire Shipman. Just as tax policy does for Paul Krugman. Just as civil rights does for Tom Brokaw. Just as Social Security does for the Democratic National Committee. Obviously it is very much in the interest of any political party to have as many of its positions as possible identified with simple decency and equity, and it is precisely in encouraging the public in such an identification that "media bias" consists. On such matters, the media are inclined to believe, there can be no right and left, only right and wrong. What could it mean to say that someone is "biased" towards decency? Isn't everyone?—apart, I mean, from the wicked, the stupid, and the degenerate.

Such an attitude naturally leads, here and there, to attempts also to identify the wicked, the stupid, and the degenerate, which may have been what produced the outcry against conservative bias in the post-election period. Tom Daschle, the Democratic majority leader in the Senate, went so far as to accuse Mr. Limbaugh of fomenting violence against Democrats. His listeners, he said, "aren't satisfied just to listen. They want to act because they got emotionally invested. And so, you know, the threats to those of us in public life go up dramatically." And, he added, "We see it in foreign countries and we think, well, my God, how can this religious fundamentalism become so violent? Well, it's that same shrill rhetoric. It's the same shrill power that motivates. . . . Pretty soon, it becomes physical in addition to just verbal, and that's happening in this country."

Talk about emotionally invested! There was quite an outcry from the media watchdogs of the right that Daschle's intemperate remarks were not more widely reported—and reported as intemperate—in the mainstream media, but these are so obviously the words of a man exhausted and exasperated after a losing campaign that it

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might be no more than a matter of tact to pretend that he never said them. More worrying to me is the ignorance of Daschle's assumption—always supposing that at some level he really believes what he says—that vigorous, even hyperbolical democratic debate and Islamic fundamentalism have the same origins and results. Osama bin Laden's hatred of good people like himself is apparently to T. Daschle just a slightly more enthusiastic version of Rush Limbaugh's. On the other hand, that Mr. Daschle might be supposed to understand our enemies so little could explain a lot.

John Leland, writing in *The New York Times*'s "Week in Review" section, did not go so far as Senator Daschle, but he can hardly be supposed to be any fonder of Mr. Limbaugh. Having applied to Robert Thompson, someone calling himself a professor of media and popular culture at Syracuse University, for an explanation of "why the right rules the radio waves," he was told that "the liberal tradition as we understand it acknowledges a diversity of people and values" which is "easily thrown back in their face by making them"—that is, presumably, liberals—"look mealy-mouthed." The flattering assumption to the left here is of course that they are too clever to go over well on what is essentially a medium for stupid people, which is the less diplomatic way to speak of those without a proper appreciation for "a diversity of people and values."

The same assumption is behind Mr. Leland's conclusion that "whatever the effects of the conservative dominance of the radio dial, there's no one on the left who can carve meat like Mr. Limbaugh or Mr. [Sean] Hannity. As for the earnest Ivy League variety, ever eager to engage in serious debate over significant issues, they can always go write for 'The West Wing.' Its ratings have been falling, by the way." The earnest Ivy Leaguer has always been easily persuaded that his tastes make up in intelligence for what they lack in general popularity. Sometimes they do too. But there is nothing in the least intelligent about attempting to replace political differences with moral ones. It is that, and not criticism of Senator Daschle, which is truly reminiscent of the aims of Islamic fundamentalism.

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Books

Who reads Mencken now?

by Hilton Kramer

I observe a tendency since his death to estimate him in terms of the content of his books. . . . Nothing could do him worse justice
—H. L. Mencken, on Huneker,
in *Prejudices: Third Series*

The passage of time has not been kind to the reputation of H. L. Mencken. While the writer who was famously described by Walter Lippmann in the 1920s as "the most powerful influence on this whole generation of educated people" is still a legend in the folklore of American life and letters, it is my impression that he is now very little read. Only the pioneering, often entertaining studies in his multi-volume, much-revised *The American Language* (1919–1936) seem to have survived the oblivion to which posterity has consigned the bulk of his enormous output. Yet even this, his magnum opus, is now mainly consulted by other specialists in the study of American speech. Almost everything else—the books on Shaw and Nietzsche, his *Notes on Democracy* and *In Defense of Women*, the six volumes of *Prejudices*, the literary criticism and much more—gathers dust on the shelves of our libraries and used book shops.

This is not, in my view, a case of unjust neglect. Rereading Mencken in the first decade of the twenty-first century can be a disheartening experience, as I have lately discovered. Even the political reporting that once gave me a chuckle now strikes me as more dispiriting than amusing. The facile rhetoric of remorseless, uproarious ridicule that made Mencken a culture hero in the 1920s turns out, in retrospect, to have been exactly what Irving Babbitt said it was in 1928—"intellectual vaudeville," full of bluster and farce aimed at what now seem easy targets, but thin in intellectual substance and woefully lacking in a sense of history.

That in its heyday this intellectual vaudeville was found to be vastly entertaining, and indeed liberating, by a great many intelligent people is not to be doubted. But not to be doubted, either, is that ours was a very different country and a very different culture in the early years of the twentieth century. It was a far more provincial country with a far more philistine culture than comparable readers would find tolerable today. In many respects, especially in his response to radical politics and the modernist avant-garde, Mencken shared this philistine outlook. It was only on the subject of religion that he departed from it, and even in that respect the role in which he cast himself—that of the village atheist—was already an established feature of provincial America. One of the keys to Mencken's popularity with the young was his success in stripping the whole subject of its solemnity, treating religion not as a weighty matter, but as farce.

Unfortunately, he treated a great many other serious subjects in the same way. What really separates us now from Mencken's eager acolytes in the 1920s—and,

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for that matter, from Mencken himself—are precisely the horrors as well as the achievements of the twentieth century that he missed or dismissed or otherwise chose to regard as beneath serious notice. Among them, alas, were the two World Wars, the Leninist revolution and the spread of Communist totalitarianism, Hitler's rise to power and the Nazi conquest of Western Europe, the Holocaust, and virtually all of the principal currents of modern thought in literature, philosophy, and the arts. While he busied himself demolishing the pretensions of yahoo preachers, rotarians, prohibitionists, and sundry writers and public figures with little claim on the attention of posterity, Mencken remained cheerfully oblivious to the political and cultural earthquakes that were irreversibly altering the very civilization he claimed to represent. That, I believe, is the fundamental reason why Mencken is so little read today.

Still, if Mencken is no longer much read—and, for some of us, no longer even readable—what remains of the Mencken legend has proved to be sufficiently durable to assure him a place in that class of secondary historical personages whom many people are interested in reading about. In this respect, at least, Mencken has had the luck, more than a century after his debut as a journalist and critic, to engage the attention of a gifted biographer who is himself a journalist and critic, and the good news is that Terry Teachout's *The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken*[1] is one of the best of the many biographies that have been devoted to the subject since the 1920s. It is certainly the best introduction to the subject that is now available, and unlike some of the others I have read it neither hesitates to give us the lowdown on Mencken's many deficiencies as a writer nor goes overboard in exonerating him from the many charges that continue to be brought against him—including my own. About the character flaws of the man himself, which in retrospect are fairly numerous and sometimes grave, Mr. Teachout is remarkably candid, too.

This is not to say that *The Skeptic* is a debunking or deconstructive study. Mr. Teachout writes with a good deal of affection and respect for his subject and, as a seasoned journalist himself, with a certain envy as well, but without minimizing the serious fault to be found in both the life and the work. *The Skeptic* is, in this respect, a distinctly un-Menckenesque book, and for that we can be grateful. For it was rarely Mencken's own practice as a writer to give us an even-handed account of anything—in literature or in life—that won his admiration or, what was more often the case, provoked his scorn. As a consequence of this disabused approach to his subject, Mr. Teachout is able to give us vivid accounts of both Mencken's phenomenal stardom in the 1920s and the collapse of his influence once that heady decade had run its course. For like the failed investments that caused the 1929 Wall Street Crash, Mencken's stock, too, proved in the dark days of the 1930s Depression to have been wildly overrated. What Mr. Teachout has thus given us in this biography is a history of a fallen idol.

But what sort of idol was Mencken in the period of his prime? Three-quarters of a century after the curtain came down on Mencken's virtuosic performance as master of the revels, it requires a certain leap of the imagination to comprehend not only the nature of his success but also the character of the public that responded so enthusiastically to the sweeping indictment of American democracy and the American people that was so central to his journalistic mission. The louder he barked about the stupidity, the ignorance, the cowardice, and the backwardness of American society and its institutions, the more avidly was he embraced as a touchstone of wisdom and a guide to life. And although Mencken was said to be "the god of the undergraduates" in the 1920s, it wasn't only the young who responded to his appeal. Intellectual eminences on the order of Edmund Wilson

1 *The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken*, by Terry Teachout; HarperCollins, 432 pages, $29.95.

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and Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes were no less eager to join in cheering Mencken on.

My own view is that Mencken's ascendancy in the 1920s cannot be understood in isolation from the single stupidest legislative act ever perpetrated upon the American people: the passing into law in 1919 of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibited the manufacture, transportation, sale, and possession of alcoholic beverages. This had the immediate effect of criminalizing the tastes and habits of a massive, law-abiding segment of American society. It had the additional effect of making the Government and its elected representatives objects of widespread derision and disrespect.

Minus the consequences of Prohibition, Mencken would no doubt have continued to enjoy a highly successful career as an anti-establishment journalist with a flair for comic ridicule, just as he had in the years preceding the enactment of the Eighteenth Amendment. It took Prohibition to make him an idol. When the law itself was seen to be both ridiculous and easily flouted, Mencken was given a much larger public stage on which to perform his railing, irreverent vaudeville. The Government had itself created an enormous scofflaw public, as it may be called, ready to respond with enthusiasm to the free-wheeling assaults on the probity and authority of American institutions that Mencken produced as serial entertainment.

In the early 1920s, stirred on by the inanities of Prohibition, Mencken discovered that what really interested him as a critic was neither literature nor politics but something else—the manners and mores of American life, of what nowadays we call lifestyle. "This shift of focus," writes Mr. Teachout, "is mirrored in the changing contents of the *Prejudices* collections. Where *Prejudices: Second Series* (1920) had led off with 'The National Letters,' *Prejudices: Third Series* (1922) opens with a similarly extended essay called 'On Being an American' in which Mencken . . . hands down a comprehensive indictment of American culture." This is the key passage cited by Mr. Teachout:

> Here the general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of integrity, of self-respect, of honor is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts, has read fifty good books, and practices the common decencies stands out as brilliantly as a wart on a bald head, and is thrown willy-nilly into a meager and exclusive aristocracy. And here, more than anywhere else that I know of or have heard of, the daily panorama of human existence, of private and communal folly—the unending procession of governmental extortions and chicaneries, of commercial brigandages and throat-slittings, of theological buffooneries, of aesthetic ribaldries, of legal swindles and harlotries, of miscellaneous rogueries, villainies, imbecilities, grotesqueries, and extravagances—is so inordinately gross and preposterous, so perfectly brought up to the highest conceivable amperage, so steadily enriched with an almost fabulous daring and originality, that only the man who was born with a petrified diaphragm can fail to laugh himself to sleep every night, and to wake every morning with all the eager, unflagging expectation of a Sunday-school superintendent touring the Paris peep-shows.

Well, you can see why Mencken's vaudeville was such a resounding success in the boom years of the 1920s. Mr. Teachout is surely correct in observing that "All of Mencken is in this passage," and correct, too, in pointing out that "On Being an American" could have served "as a prospectus for the *American Mercury,* in which Mencken would turn away from the world of art to jeer at every aspect of the common life in postwar America, secure in the knowledge that his subscribers would laugh with him." Yet, while Mencken was jeering at everything he took to be the "common life" in America, and delighting the many fans who were even more ignorant than he was, he managed to overlook just about everything of artistic, intellectual, and his-

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torical distinction in American cultural life—never mind what was happening in Europe in the 1920s. You could learn more about the cultural achievements of the 1920s on both sides of the Atlantic from a single issue of the monthly *Dial* than from the entire run of the *American Mercury*. Later on, in the later 1920s and the 1930s, the same could be said about any single issue of *The Hound and Horn* and *Partisan Review*. Mencken never understood any of the period's achievements at that level of cultural life.

There were other American writers who did, however—two of whom, James Gibbons Huneker and Willa Cather, Mencken professed to admire but from whom he appears to have learned little or nothing. Here, for example, is Willa Cather reviewing George Bernard Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite* for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1899:

> From Mr. G. Bernard Shaw one always expects the unconventional. With his reputation as a whimsical iconoclast so firmly established, it probably occurred to him that the most unconventional thing he could do was to write a thoroughly conventional book. At any rate, he has done so, and his essays on the Nibelung Ring may safely be introduced into musical libraries, or quoted in musical lectures, and parts of his book, at least, may even be read with impunity by young ladies cramming for their first opera season. One must admit, however, that these are not the most interesting or brilliant of the work. In short, Mr. Shaw does Wagner the honor to take him quite seriously and praiseworthily refrains from making merry at his expense. There are only four people, I believe, whom Mr. Shaw does take seriously—Ibsen, Wagner, Eleonora Duse and himself.

About the great events in music and opera, in the theater and in literature at the turn of the twentieth century, Cather wrote with a critical understanding that was far beyond anything Mencken ever comprehended, and she produced a body of critical work that should be better known than it is. In Cather's writings on the arts we hear a highly cultivated voice of the civilization that was either mocked or merely ignored in Mencken's vaudeville. Which is why Willa Cather's criticism can still be read with pleasure and profit, while many of Mencken's tirades are now bound to make us wince.[2]

In *The Skeptic*, Mr. Teachout has given us a fine portrait of the man and his work and his period, but I doubt if it will win Mencken many new readers. He is now too much of a period piece to be revivable. And the really ugly aspects of Mencken's mentality—the vicious anti-Semitism, the total identification with German superiority and moral authority even in the face of Hitler's criminality, and his unflagging contempt for democratic institutions in a period when fascism and communism loomed as the leading alternatives—all of this, combined with a cocksure confidence in his own virtue, is finally unforgivable.

The prophets today

Norman Podhoretz The Prophets: Who They Were, What They Are. Free Press, 390 pages, $30

reviewed by Hadley Arkes

Norman Podhoretz approaches the prophets of the Hebrew Bible with all the care that scholarship can bring to the project. But his purpose in the end is to administer a jolt—to bring out the challenge that classical prophecy would pose against the orthodoxies of our own day. Those new orthodoxies have commanded their deepest allegiance among the political class that rules now in the academy and the media, in the schools of law and the courts. That the

2 See *The World and the Parish: Willa Cather's Articles and Reviews, 1893–1902*, selected and edited with a commentary by William M. Curtin; University of Nebraska Press, 1970. Two volumes. Nearly a thousand pages.

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outlook of this class has come to be seen as so intertwined with "modernity" is not to establish the futility of classical prophecy or the irrelevance of what the prophets had to teach. It may only confirm that the ancient vices of idolatry have taken a shape more suited to our own times. When they are recognized in their various modern guises they may seem tame in their familiarity, but Podhoretz urges us to take seriously the notion that they hold for us, today as in the past, the same evil that the prophets had the wit to see and decry in their own age.

And yet, the classic Hebrew prophecies came to us at times in parables, with some layers of meaning discreetly hidden from the vulgar. Uncovering those layers of meaning has given rise to a whole industry, or vocation, of biblical scholarship. Podhoretz has disclaimed the authority of the most accomplished biblical scholars, some of whom were his own teachers. That disclaimer might have been too modestly made, for his learning here is considerable. When he majored in English at Columbia in the early 1950s, he also worked toward a degree of Bachelor of Hebrew Literature at the College of Jewish Studies, then a division of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Abraham Joshua Heschel was on the faculty then, and Podhoretz came to know other scholars in this field when he published them in *Commentary* magazine. He took on the editorship of *Commentary* in his late twenties, after a stint of study in Cambridge, and his editorship ran for nearly forty years.

Some reviewers have been so struck by the biblical scholarship that they have fastened on that character of the book; but in that reading, I think, they miss the point. What is at work in the book are the same perspective and concerns that were described in his editorship. His understanding was furnished by a serious study of literature and theology; and in growing up in Brooklyn in the 1930s and 1940s he had *cultivated* at least that urbanity of one anchored in the world, able to see it as it was. From this background of study and experience, he brought his intelligence to bear on the issues that vexed our politics. His concern is to read the prophets seriously, but to read them with a sense of what they may genuinely have to say about those issue of moral consequence that trouble our politics right now. In this sense, as Podhoretz notes, he brings to the task the character of an "amateur" in the most literal sense, as one who loves the subject and approaches the prophets with love and reverence.

To take in the full sweep of the prophets, from Joshua to the Second Zechariah, from the death of Moses to the end of the sixth century B.C.E., is to take in a history of the Jews that is worthy of Hollywood, in its scenes of miracles and mayhem, of picturesque slaughter along with romance and martyrdom. There are warriors collecting foreskins of their enemies and aggressive wives, like Jezebel, egging on their pusillanimous husbands.

After Joshua's breathtaking performance at the battle of Jericho, he does an encore no less striking. He confronts a coalition of Amorite chieftains, and God comes to his aid again, raining hailstones down on the Amorites, and granting yet another miracle: He will have the sun stand still until Joshua finishes off the Amorites. After the death of Joshua, an angel appears, delivering yet another in what would be, over the years, a string of familiar complaints and charges: The children of Israel are denounced for failing to fulfill their part of the covenant with God, the God who brought them out of Egypt, and even now promises not to abandon them. But the Israelites have mingled with the inhabitants of the surrounding lands, and picked up their habits. They set up altars in groves, and some fall into the worship of Baal. The saga of the prophets becomes an ongoing series of recriminations and warnings, of dooms foretold, to a people that have fallen away from the "laws and statutes" of the one God. For it is precisely those laws and

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statutes that have defined the people of Israel and their mission as a people "chosen."

Samuel warned the Hebrews that if they chose to be governed by a king, they would experience all of the corruptions that come with monarchy. Kings would deploy their sons and their property as though they were their own. Still, the people shunned that advice, and what followed were the kingships of Saul (c. 1020–1004 B.C.E) and David (c. 1004–965 B.C.E). Podhoretz characterizes them as "relatively benign," but they were attended with rough times and high costs. After the death of David's son, Solomon, the united kingdom broke into two, with a kingdom in Judah in the north and in Israel in the South. From that point follows a string of disasters, which might have borne out the presentiments of Samuel.

Jewish scholars have been moved, of course, to puzzle about a God who would dispense a rough justice on the people He had chosen, punishing them, say, for the sins of David. But as the story unfolds we see other incidents, as harsh or astounding. The celebrated Elijah offers a challenge to the rival prophets of Baal, collecting about four hundred and fifty of them in a contest to see whose sacrifice could be consumed with fire from above. Elijah's sacrifice is consumed, along with everything in the immediate vicinity, and his adherents then proceed to kill all of the prophets on the other side for the sake of rooting out the idolatry in their midst.

Just from these ingredients, in a story richly unfolding, the record describes a God not at all reluctant to intervene in history and take sides. Elishah exhibited the power of bringing a child back from the dead, and his power did not desert him at his own death, for he managed his own resurrection. And Elijah, after a life filled with incident, had the distinct honor of being borne directly to heaven with a fiery chariot. With these ingredients in place, the story of Christ's advent and resurrection is striking, but not novel. The awareness of that record may only confirm Paul's observation that the account of God-become-man was, for the Jews, a difficulty, but for the Greeks an absurdity.

For the Greeks, and the cultivated pagans of Rome, there were the things that were permanent and the things that were ephemeral and contingent. The God of this scheme was part of the permanent things, but in that event, as Aristotle suggested, God would not have moving parts, for God could not be material. Material things decomposed, and they could not be part of the permanent things. From that understanding one could derive the God who was the First Cause in the universe, the unmoved mover, though not the God who negotiated with Abraham over Sodom and Gomorrah, or the God who died on the cross. The kind of God who could direct Elijah to cross the lines of different polities, cashier the rulers in one place and install rulers in another—that had to be a God with a universal jurisdiction. And it figured: the God who authored a universal law of physics would not have authored a moral law confined to Damascus or Jersey City.

Podhoretz catches the logical core of the matter when he observes that "If only one God exists, then it is axiomatic that He is the God of all people." The classical philosophers could reason back to a First Cause that is not merely contingent, and Augustine, using his wit to expose the incoherence of the Roman polytheists, suggested that reason itself could work its way back to that one God. Nevertheless, Jews and Christians take, as a distinct teaching of revelation, the God who disclosed himself as the Creator. From that point, Podhoretz engages, as he says, the axioms of reasoning, to extract the God who covers all—and whose laws then are universal. Spinoza had taunted the Hebrews: they would be "no less blessed," he wrote, "if God had called all men equally to salvation, nor would God have been less present to them for being equally present to others; their laws would have been no less just if they had been ordained for all."

As Podhoretz argues, however, there was

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no hypocrisy, because the universal sweep of the teaching had been present from the beginning in the awareness of the God who was One. And for that reason Podhoretz sets himself decorously, but emphatically, against the biblical scholars who seek to argue that there was a shift, somewhere around the time of Amos, from the God tied to a "particular" people, exacting rituals of obedience, to a more universal God, available to all, with "moral" principles that swept now, more broadly, beyond the written statutes and the prosaic, daily rituals. "There is," Podhoretz writes,

> no problem here [of God covering all people with his laws and concern]. A question arises only because God has entered into a special relation with one people alone, the people of Israel.
>
> [H]e affirms that, for inscrutable reasons of His own, God has chosen the children of Israel as the human instrument through which to reveal Himself and to promulgate His laws and His commandments. But in order to spread those laws and those commandments throughout the world, the people of Israel first have to fight against their own attraction to idolatry, which is always standing in the way of their divinely ordained mission.

Podhoretz explains here the puzzle among some commentators as to how early the Jews had been committed to monotheism. Had they not been committed to monotheism from the beginning, from God's covenant with Abraham? Well, yes and no. For as Podhoretz points out there was a lingering "monaltry," an inclination to worship one God, but to acknowledge other, lesser gods. The continuing war against this paganism defined the mission of the prophets. The record confronting them, in the daily lives of the people, was grim by any reckoning: there were Jews practicing cannibalism at the time of Micah and apparently persisting with the sacrifice of children even at the time of Jeremiah.

Perhaps with a sense of the baseness still unmeasured, still not experienced in its bottomless depths, Amos was moved to declare, with a certain anguish, that even murder may be better than idolatry. What could not be ruled out, in the murders and villainies yet to be licensed when people had detached themselves radically from any sense of the laws that cast up restraints? Later, Zephaniah would insist that God had to concentrate now on Judah and Jerusalem because, as Podhoretz writes, they had been "so thoroughly infected by idolatry of every kind—Baalism, astral worship and child sacrifice dedicated to the god Molech."

Podhoretz candidly notes that, as political seers, the prophets had a dismal record. Neither Zephaniah nor Nahum foresaw the rise of Persia. Neither Habakkuk nor Jeremiah anticipated that the Persians would take the ascendance over the Babylonians. But Podhoretz argues that acuteness in prediction is not the standard against which the prophets should be measured. By the end of the period of classical prophecy, idolatry had been discredited and virtually purged from the understanding of what defined a Jewish people. By any measure of things, that was a massive achievement, and without it, it is hard to imagine the new sect of Jewish-Christians taking on the task of bringing that rigorous monotheism to the rest of the world.

But at the same time, that achievement could not have been managed by prophets who were willing, in the modern style, to recede from "judgmentalism" at every sign of moral slippage. Nor by men who fancied that they could bring peace to the world by refusing to confront the evil before them. It would be a grave mistake, as Podhoretz says, to identify the prophets with the fuzzy liberalism of our own day, ever ready to turn swords into plowshares (citing Isaiah) and hope that, if the wicked went unopposed by arms, the lion would lie down with the lamb. Podhoretz reads the prophets as men never taken in by that kind of utopianism. They leave to God, and only God, the office of performing miracles. In the meantime, they would call the Jews to

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look seriously at the evils before them, including the evils of their own making.

As Podhoretz understands the lessons of the prophets, the evils they sought to resist were not confined to Jews. It was just that the Jews had to confront them among themselves before they could rightly take up their mission of bringing the laws to the rest of the world. By the same measure, the things the prophets had to teach would instruct the people who were not of the Jews, and even the atheists. But as he makes this move, he appeals to "the terms which, in his own heart, each man knows." That is a classical formulation of the "natural law," the law that is accessible to people even when they do not know, or follow, the laws or the rituals among Jews and Christians. With that move, Podhoretz can encompass figures as diverse as Saul Bellow, a Jew quite detached from the religious tradition, and George Orwell, a professed atheist. In Orwell's courageous opposition to murderous totalitarian regimes, Podhoretz finds a man "doing God's work." In this vein, appealing to the natural law, Podhoretz appreciates the American Founders with their appeal to "Nature and Nature's God."

In one form or another, the central vice, as Podhoretz sees it, is antinomianism, the rejection of lawfulness and the moral restraints that the law prescribes. In the ancient world, it came along with paganism and polytheism; in our own world, the detachment from moral restraints comes from moral relativism in all its familiar forms—cultural relativism, nihilism, postmodernism, and even radical feminism, with its denial of "nature" and of moral truths springing from that nature. In our own time, the malady expresses itself most vividly in the release of sexuality from the framework of marriage and commitments sustained by law. The vast wave of divorce has brought wreckage in the lives of children, including rising rates of suicide among the young. With the ethic of easier divorce came a new rationale to justify sacrificing the needs of children to the interests of their parents. As Podhoretz suggests, this may be the form that "child sacrifice" has taken in our own time, and the results have hardly been less deadly.

Podhoretz cites here the Palestinian intifada, where the Palestinians were willing to incite their own children to challenge Israeli tanks, and in that way make martyrs of their children. Yet when it comes to the willingness of parents to sacrifice children to their own interests, and even to see the lives of their children snuffed out, America over the last generation has surely given the world a far more dramatic example. I take it as an example of Podhoretz's delicacy that he says nothing here of abortion, though there could hardly be an example of his point more evident or lethal (with about 1.3 million deaths each year, carried out for nearly thirty years). As the philosopher Robert George remarked, "an infallible sign of [idolatry, or the worship of] false gods is the demand for innocent blood."

In other instances, the record of universalism and particularism was also politically rather mixed. Was the "wrong" of genocide a universal wrong, to be resisted in all places? Or would the Holocaust be regarded mainly as a crime committed against Jews, with no proper analogue anywhere else? Jews have been resolved that it was a grievous fault of political leaders in the West that they turned away from the prospect of rescuing the victims in Hitler's death camps. But there was no notable movement among American Jews in the 1970s to mobilize American arms to resist the genocide carried out in Cambodia, as the Khmer Rouge slaughtered about two million out of a population of eleven million. Jews showed a reluctance to seem parochial, in defending their own interests, when it came to self-described American Nazis seeking to march through Skokie, Illinois and taunt survivors from Hitler's camps. In this case, organizations like the American Jewish Committee identified the interests of Jews with the interest in preserving a regime of the First Amendment. To my mind, there was a

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grave mistake in assuming that the First Amendment would be oblivious to an assault in the form of speech, or that it made no distinction between the victims and the assailants. But was this reaction, on the part of the Jewish community, a move to forego the narrow interests of Jews for the sake of becoming the bearer of a broader ethic to a wider community?

Podhoretz argues that the particular is not lost in the universal, that the insistence on ritual does not mark a deafness to a moral world extending beyond the Jews. But as he candidly acknowledges, he has not exactly been Orthodox himself in his adherence to the rituals, with their insistent, daily demands. As he moves to the natural law, written on our hearts—as he moves, that is, to an understanding that encompasses the Jews who have drifted into atheism, along, one might say, with righteous gentiles, he would seem to be moving quite decisively to the side of the moral ethic rather than the particular ritual, to the universal law rather than the rules of the tribe. And he is anchored there even though one enduring question remains unanswered. That is the question of theodicy or God's justice: Why does God permit the wicked to prosper, while the righteous and the innocent suffer? Podhoretz takes it as a cardinal point in favor of the honesty of the Bible that this question is recorded persistently, as a charge against God, even though the answers are never finally satisfying. Habakkuk (c. 586–610 B.C.E.) confronts God on the question, and laments at one point, "Oh Lord, how long shall I cry and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save? Why dost thou show me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance?"

It is surely no answer to the question to retort, as God does to Job, Where were you when I "laid the foundations of the earth"? The problem may not be so acute if one doubts that God intervenes in history, and that a Himmler is receiving his punishment even now, and everlastingly, in the life that comes after death. But the problem remains nagging for the Jews, for as Podhoretz notes, nowhere "does the Hebrew Bible unmistakably and unambiguously hold out the prospect of an afterlife in which rights are wronged and wrongs are righted." For the Orthodox, these things will be taken care of in "the world to come." But in the meantime, Podhoretz settles in with the mysteries of God. The doubting, but reverent man, will finally "bow his head, accept in all humility that there are questions he cannot and never will be able to answer, and he will rely on faith to carry him through." And yet, Podhoretz's faith here seems to be undergirded with the conviction that there are moral laws anchoring our world, laws that instruct us in the ways of duties manfully accepted, and of liberties forborne. With all of the sober doubts there is a conviction that God will keep his promises, that He will say, as He did through Isaiah, "Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine."

Whispered disclosures

Charles Baudelaire Complete Poems, translated by Walter Martin. Routledge, 463 pages, $14.95

reviewed by Eric Ormsby

To all the fierce technical difficulties of translating French verse into English—the relative restrictiveness of French vocabulary, the alexandrine line (always uneasy in our language), the precise yet variable positioning of the caesura, the purity and predominance of the French vowels—Baudelaire added a further, seemingly insuperable obstacle: the subtle torque between impossibly polished form and violent, often splenetic content. To use painterly terms, which Baudelaire himself, with his keen eye, might have approved, it is as though a Bosch or a Goya chose to paint his most terrible visions in the manner of Fragonard. Oddly enough, this mélange of bitter bile

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and formal delicacy has proved seductive, but how to convey it in good English?

How, for example, should a translator grapple with the following stanza from Baudelaire's notorious "Une charogne"?

> Les mouches bourdonnait sur ce ventre
> putride,
> D'où sortaient de noirs bataillons
> De larves, qui coulaient comme un épais
> liquide
> Le long de ces vivants haillons.

In his new translation, Walter Martin renders the lines:

> Flies sizzled as the putrefying guts
> Disgorged a noxious flood of fresh
> Troops—a viscous, thick river of maggots
> To plunder the last flesh.

This is a valiant attempt, but notice how Martin must overload his lines with adjectives both for the sake of the cadence as well as the rhymes, one of which at least clanks on the ear ("guts"/"maggots"). The "thick liquid" (*épais liquide*) of the original has become "a viscous, thick river." And the allusive French word *ventre*, with its sexual overtones ("womb" as well as "belly"—Baudelaire is writing about a woman's corpse on the path), has become slangy and excessively coarse in "putrefying guts." It is precisely the restraint of the diction that gives the original its almost insupportable force, but this is sacrificed in the translation.

I say this not to disparage Martin's versions, which are generally good, but to illustrate the hurdles he had to leap. To render Baudelaire in the dazzling high style of which he himself was so consummate an artisan demands the hand of a rare master (one can only wonder what the later Yeats might have done with such lines). The usual recourse, of which Martin understandably avails himself, is to commingle lofty terms with more colloquial locutions: "noxious" and "plunder" over against "sizzled" and "guts." It would be unjust to belabor this; a translator should draw on all the resources of his mother tongue. But in the case of Baudelaire, such an approach risks obscuring what he himself called the "secret architecture" of *Les fleurs du mal*. This architecture has less to do, I am convinced, with the order or arrangement of the individual poems as with the shifting, sometimes tenuous, often harsh collocation of impeccable form with scabrous content. The architecture, in other words, subsists less in the overarching structure than in the cunning mortices of intense experience and suave articulation in line upon line.

Even so, Martin has his hard-won successes; indeed, in certain respects his translation stands as the best available rendering of the complete poems (as opposed to *Les fleurs du mal* alone), and comes at moments admirably close to rivaling Richard Howard's brilliant 1981 rendition. Martin, unlike Howard, has had the audacity—or the foolhardiness—to essay a strict replication of the variegated forms of the original, stanza by stanza, rhyme by rhyme; that he succeeds even partially is no mean achievement. If it leads him astray at moments, it produces small moments of triumph as well. As one of many instances, consider his opening of the sonnet "L'idéal":

> Spiked heels, fake fingernails and frizzy curls,
> The damaged goods of our degraded time,
> Those high-strung, anorexic cover-girls
> Could never satisfy a heart like mine.

Compare this with Howard's superb version:

> My heart is closed to belles in curlicues,
> those worshipped beauties of a shopworn age
> when fingers were for spinets and when feet
> wore out six pairs of silver-buckled shoes.

Neither translation is particularly close to the wording of the French, but each in its own way captures the spirit of the original, and does so convincingly. To be sure, each translator owes much to the earlier, astoundingly fine Baudelaire "imitations" by

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Robert Lowell (how could it be otherwise, given such a precedent?). Still, it seems to me that Howard, alone among Baudelaire translators, continually achieves that precarious equipoise so characteristic of *Les fleurs du mal*, and which Flaubert was perhaps the first to note, in a congratulatory letter of July 13, 1857, when he wrote: "The line is utterly crammed to bursting with the idea" (*La phrase est toute bourrée par l'idée, à en craquer*). That the line never bursts is the effect of form; indeed, the perfection of the form in Baudelaire stands in almost exact inverse proportion to the violence of the content. And it is this repleteness of vehement emotion just held in check by the chosen form that makes so many of Baudelaire's most powerful lines seem to seethe at, and reach beyond, their surfaces, like waves plumed by spray. (In 1887, twenty years after the poet's ignominious decline and death, in the opening entry of his journal, Jules Renard sought to convey this quality when he commented on, "Baudelaire's dense phrasing, as if laden with electric fluids.") Richard Howard succeeds best at conveying this elusive aspect of the original, as in his opening stanza to "Recueillement" ("Meditation"):

> Behave, my Sorrow! let's have no more scenes.
> Evening's what you wanted—Evening's here:
> a gradual darkness overtakes the town,
> bringing peace to some, to others pain.

Howard captures the aura of huddled intimacy that gives the poem so much of its charm, as if the poet in speaking to himself were addressing a fretful child. The cadences of the third line reproduce in English the effect of Baudelaire's French with an almost eerie fidelity. By contrast, Martin never comes this close to the music of the originals (his version of the same stanza begins: "A gradual numbness spreads through streets and homes," which omits the opening colloquy and so distorts the tone).

Nevertheless, Martin's skill at injecting colloquialisms into his translations stands him in good stead when he comes to deal with the various poems, often burlesque or obscene, that are peripheral to *Les fleurs du mal*. Baudelaire isn't usually credited with a sense of humor but some of these lesser pieces are quite funny at times, and Martin captures their flavor well, as in "Concerning a Jackass who Claimed to be a Friend of His":

> He told me he was well-to-do,
> That cholera had scared him off;
> Bit of a tight-wad, *entre-nous*,
> But a die-hard Opera buff;
>
> Crazy about the open air,
> Thanks to his friend, M. Corot;
> Avid to have a coach and pair
> (A coach and pair is *comme il faut*) . . .
>
> Oh, and don't forget the 20,
> 000 shares he has in *Le Nord*,
> Not to mention the mint he
> Made, on the frames by Oppenord.

Or this, from *Le monstre* (which Martin entitles "Rara Avis, or the Nymphomaniad"):

> No, no, you're no spring chicken, dear,
> You're rather like a spring gargoyle . . .
> High life and harlotry and beer
> Have all taken their toll, old girl,
> (You're not exactly 'new-laid,' dar-
>
> lingest infanta!) Nonetheless,
> Your up and down and out career
> Endows you with a certain gloss,
> A luster things acquire from wear—
> I love the well-worn none the less.

By contrast, and despite his skill in rhyming, Martin often fluffs his versions, especially at their endings. The great poem *Un voyage à Cythère*, in which the poet views himself as a hanged man, mutilated, castrated, and flayed by scavenger birds and ravening jackals—executed by Venus, as it were—closes with a prayer that is at once nauseated and supplicating:

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Dans ton île, ô Vénus! Je n'ai trouvé debout
Qu'un gibet symbolique où pendait mon image . . .
—Ah! Seigneur! Donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon coeur et mon corps sans dégoût!

Richard Howard gets this just right:

On Aphrodite's island all I found
was a token gallows where my image hung . . .
Lord give me strength and courage to behold
my body and my heart without disgust!

But Martin spoils both the austerity of the phrasing and the meaning of the final lines when he writes:

Goddess of Love, your isle was nothing but
An emblem with an image, torn apart . . .
O God of love, grant me the strength of heart
To contemplate my corpse without disgust!

It is his heart and body, not his corpse (that would be too easy!), which the poet must view without disgust; moreover, Baudelaire is explicit: it is his own effigy that he sees, not some vague "emblem with an image." Such an ending gauzes the shocking particularity of the poem. Weak closing lines disfigure too many of Martin's versions. Still, he can be very fine, as in his rendering of *Le voyage*, perhaps Baudelaire's greatest poem (which both he and Richard Howard, for some baffling reason, re-name "Travellers"), of which the following stanza is a small sample:

The hangman's jest, the martyr's final hour;
The bloody feast of St. Oblivion;
The despot enervated by his power,
And men who crave his brutal discipline.

This translation appears under the aegis of FyfieldBooks, an impressive new series in which unusually good translations of Petrarch, Victor Hugo, Michelangelo, and others have already appeared. There is a useful chronology of important dates (marred only by the misspelling of T. S. Eliot's name!), an ebullient section of "Afterthoughts," in which the translator proffers his own thoughts on the hazards of translation, and a brief list of sources; like all the volumes I have seen, this is a handsome book. Best of all, the French originals stand *en face* to the English translations.

The translations by Martin and Howard (complemented by the delightful 1997 anthology *Baudelaire in English*, in the Penguin Classics series, with its unexpected profusion of beautiful, and sometimes bizarre and even quirky, renderings of individual poems by scores of poets) afford the English-speaking reader almost everything he or she may need in order to appreciate the genius of Baudelaire the poet.

In a famous letter of 1871, the adolescent Arthur Rimbaud could proclaim of Baudelaire that while he was "the king of poets, *a real god*," his form was "drab" (*mesquine*). He clinched this opinion with the dictum: "Inventions of the unknown demand new forms." Baudelaire was no formal innovator; in fact, he exploited virtually every genre and form in the classical repertoire, though invariably with a caustic twist. In *Les fleurs du mal* there are lyrics worthy of Charles d'Orléans or the young Victor Hugo; fables with stinging morals reminiscent of La Fontaine; speeches and dramatic monologues equal to those of Racine or Corneille. And yet, for all Baudelaire's formal panache and range, each poem in the book is unmistakably his. Earlier poets had been just as bitter or morbid; the grim and beautiful sonnets of Ronsard's old age are as harrowing as anything in *Les fleurs du mal*. What was perhaps new in Baudelaire—and it is a novelty that confutes Rimbaud's stricture—was that the artistic strictures did not merely contain the intensity of his subject-matter but augmented it. The effect is a bit uncanny, like overhearing a whispered disclosure in a confessional which at once repels and enthralls.

The unanticipated collision of high-glossed verbal finish with degrading and shaming themes has few parallels in the history of literature; perhaps only Swift or the later Yeats match Baudelaire's accomplish-

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ment in this regard ("For love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement" could be a line by the French master). In the end, it is the form that conveys the shock while the content—whether it be human carcass, black bile, or Satanic litany—takes its force from the chaste and austere lineaments in which it garbs itself.

Love and error

Niklas Holzberg
Ovid: The Poet and His Work,
translated by G. M. Goshgarian.
Cornell, 217 pages, $39.95

reviewed by Gerald J. Russello

Ovid is not exactly the proper example for Roman greatness. He is the author, after all, of famously lascivious love manuals and erotic poetry, teaching in his *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*) how to pick up girls outside the Forum and generally mocking the pretensions of early imperial Rome, which caused Augustus to exile him in late middle-age. For generations of schoolboys (myself included), Ovid was excluded from the usual high-school *cursus authorum romanorum* of Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil. Along with the equally off-color Catullus, Ovid had to wait for the supposed maturity of college.

And yet there is no question that Ovid belongs in the first rank of Roman poets. In the closing lines of the *Metamorphoses*, he predicted that his fame would live on whatever his end, and so it proved to be. His influence was already evident shortly after his death; in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries he surpassed Virgil and Horace as the Roman poet of choice. By the seventeenth century, as Gian Biagio Conte writes in his magisterial history of Latin literature, Ovid had become "thoroughly absorbed within European culture." This interest continues; Mary Zimmerman's experimental retelling of the *Metamorphoses* was recently a hit on Broadway, and in 1994 Michael Hoffman and James Lasdun published *After Ovid*, a collection of retellings of Ovid's tales.

The standard account divides Ovid's work into three broad stages. There is the early Ovid, the love poet who composed the *Amores* (*Experiences of Love*), the *Ars Amatoria*, and *Remedia Amoris* (*Love Therapy*), and the stylized letters of mythological women to their lovers, *Epistulae Heroidum*. Ovid then moved on to more serious works with his *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti* (*Festival Calendar*). His final years are reflected in the *Tristia* (*Elegies of Lament*) and the *Epistulae ex Ponto* (*Letters from the Black Sea*), which describe his journey from Rome and accommodation to his new surroundings.

Of his life we know little, other than what he himself tells us. That source may not be completely trustworthy, as Ovid was adept in creating and recreating his poetic persona as needed. Publius Ovidius Naso was born of minor nobility in the town of Sulmo, about ninety miles from Rome, lived roughly from 43 B.C. to A.D. 16 or 17, and died in exile. As a young man, Ovid received the rhetorical training traditional for those of his background. Rather than embarking upon the usual political career of a wealthy Roman, Ovid devoted himself to poetry. Ovid attached himself to the literary circle of the Roman aristocrat Valerius Massella but was apparently wealthy enough so as not to need the support of a patron.

When Ovid was about fifty years old, the Emperor Augustus exiled him to the town of Tomis on the Black Sea coast, at the very edge of the Empire, in what is now Romania. The reasons for the exile remain mysterious. Augustus seems to have been displeased with Ovid's love poetry, specifically the *Ars Amatoria*, and ordered them removed from the public libraries in Rome. Ovid himself only obliquely refers to his *error* as some unidentified *culpa* (fault) he learned of by accident. It did not help that, as the evidence suggests, the *culpa* somehow involved Augustus' granddaughter Julia,

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who was busily, and notoriously, violating her grandfather's renewed emphasis on moral virtue. Despite Ovid's entreaties, neither Augustus nor his successor Tiberius granted him pardon.

Along with his near-contemporaries Propertius and Tibullus, Ovid was heir to the poetic tradition of Callimachus, whose allusive, witty, and complex style suited the jaded sophisticates of the early days of the Empire. The complexity also served as convenient political covering. Augustus achieved full control of Rome only in 31 B.C., after defeating Marc Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium. Augustus then began transforming himself from the *princeps* (first in rank) of the Republic to Emperor. His position was far from secure, however, and the years of Ovid's adulthood were wracked with political and domestic threats. Poets especially needed to be careful, as the Emperor freely used literature to establish his Rome as a "Golden Era." Ovid's exile was only another installment in the imperial drama that continued until after Augustus' death in A.D. 14.

Niklas Holzberg, a distinguished scholar and Professor of Classics at the University of Munich, in this readable and comprehensive contribution to the Ovidian revival, examines each of the major works individually and as part of what he sees as Ovid's larger poetic project. His Ovid "intended systematically to develop possibilities for literary expression that Ovid's predecessors among the poets of antiquity exploited only rarely, if at all." First, Holzberg maintains, the rules and inner logic of elegy remained with Ovid in all his works, concealing at times political themes, and second, that the concept of "metamorphosis" is used deliberately as a literary device from the very beginning. While erudite, the book is accessible to non-specialists and does not require knowledge of Latin.

Elegiac poetry depicted the erotic enslavement (*servitium amoris*) of a Roman male citizen to a female slave or prostitute, and represented a reversal of both traditional Roman mores and the Augustan morals program. The roles in such poetry were sharply defined: "the unwavering devotion of an upright, poetically talented, young upper-class Roman stands over against the infidelity of a *hetaera* [courtesan];" because of her inconstancy, the male *amator* suffers for his love. Moreover, he is cast out of society for his subjugation to a faithless *dura puella* (tough chick) of an unacceptable social rank. The elegists employed political and military imagery to illustrate the *amator*'s attempts to win the loyalty of the puella, as further examples of the reversal of social roles.

Holzberg portrays the early Roman elegists as reactionaries against what they saw happening to their upper-class Roman society under Augustus's elimination of the Republic. They retreated into the world of love poetry, where the usual rules were turned upside down. There was some of this in Ovid as well, but what makes him worth reading now is how he adapted the forms of elegiac poetry for his own purposes. As Holzberg explains by the example of *Amores* 3.7, Ovid "intertwines the speaker's chronologically unfolding lament with the chronology of his recollections of each particular act." The love poetry transcends the formalism of elegy into a real narrative of characters whose psychological and emotional development we can follow. In a section entitled "Amor, Roma and the Moral of the Novel," Holzberg makes a case of Ovid not only as an accomplished parodist of his predecessors, but also as an innovative poet who was exploring what Holzberg calls the novelistic possibilities of Latin verse.

Holzberg convincingly argues that the rules of elegy became a constituent part of Ovid's work, even when his subject matter turned to myth or exile. The best example of this is perhaps the appeals to Augustus throughout the *Epistulae ex Ponto*, in which the Emperor is placed in the position of the *dura puella*, coldly refusing to favor her dis-

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tressed lover. Using the language common to the *amator*, Ovid unrealistically imagines the Emperor heeding his laments:

> aut ego me fallo nimiaque cupidine ludor,
> aut spes exili commodioris adest.
> nam minus et minus est facies in imagine tristis,
> visaque sunt dictis adnuere ora meis.
>
> Either I am mistaken and am being fooled
> by an all too violent longing,
> Or there is hope for a more agreeable place of banishment.
> For the face in the image is less and less stern,
> And it seems that the countenance is nodding consent to my words.
> *Epistulae ex Ponto*, II.8, 71-74

His inventiveness with the rules of elegy also informs Holzberg's second theme. In Ovid's poetry, everything is changing: gods and mortals take different forms, men and women assume new roles, and mortals are made divine. The *Epistulae Heroidum*, for example, set up the women as *amatores* and the long-lost men as the *puellae* who have abandoned them for war or adventure. Not even Rome, he implies, is safe; it too will pass away. In the *Amores*, Ovid describes his own transformation into a poet of elegy:

> Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam
> edere, materia conveniente modis.
> par erat inferior versus; risisse Cupido
> dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.
>
> Weapons in weighty rhythms and violent wars was I making ready
> to sing, and the matter suited the measure.
> The first line was as long as the second. Then Cupid laughed,
> They say, and stealthily stole a foot.
> *Amores* I.14

The "foot" (*pedem*) stolen by the god of love is the length of meter that transformed the intended poem from epic hexameter to elegiac couplet. Ovid was now to write about love, not war. This is the first of many indications for Holzberg of Ovidian metamorphosis, both poetical and personal. The proem to the *Metamorphoses* transforms Ovid yet again. He asks the gods to look on his project with favor, which they themselves have also "metamorphosed" from something not described into a *perpetuum carmen*, a term for epic.

The experiences Ovid endured as an exile complete his transformation. Holzberg summarizes Ovid's exilic works as those of "a seafaring, patient Odysseus learning the ways of a remote land [who] becomes, after undergoing a living death, a new member of a barbaric people," which "is something unique in ancient literature." With this study, Holzberg provides ample reason for revisiting, and enjoying, Ovid's immediacy, literary skill, and psychological insight.

Big science

Stephen Wolfram
A New Kind of Science.
Wolfram Media, 1250 pages, $44.95

reviewed by James Franklin

This is a book about mathematics. It is easy to read. It is not a popular survey of old knowledge, but an exposition of a distinctive idea by a leading thinker. What it says is true (give or take some of the more speculative parts). That is a combination that does not come along every day. It is quite enough to make the book well worth reading, however irritating some of its features are.

The distinctive idea is easy to state, though it needs some examples to appreciate. It is that simple rules can generate complex—very complex—outcomes when they are repeatedly applied. Isolated examples of this phenomenon have been known for centuries. For example, the number π has a simple definition—the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter—and there is a quite simple formula to calculate its digits. The result begins:

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3.14159265358979323846264338327950288419716939937510582097494459230781640628620899862803482534211706 8

There is no visible pattern in these digits. That initial intuitive impression can be confirmed by statistical tests that show there are about the same number of each digit, in the long run, that there are about the same number of runs up (like 159) and down (like 653), and so on. The sequence of digits exhibits the kind of complete patternlessness or randomness that can be generated by simple rules.

Wolfram is more interested in complexity that is not quite so formless. He finds it especially in the mathematical objects called cellular automata. A classic example of these fascinating entities is "Langton's ant." Take a large checkerboard, with the squares initially all white. Start at one square and color it black, and move to the square to its east. Keep moving according to this simple rule: if the square you are moving into is white, color it black and turn left; if it's black, change it to white and turn right. The result is a gradually growing trail of black dots, of an intricate and unpredictable shape something like an ant trail. (There is an animation on the Internet at http://users.libero.it/acnard/ant.html.) The complexity of the shape comes not from any complexity in the cause, but from the complex way in which the trail intersects itself and heads off in new directions.

Stephen Hawking remarked that each equation in a book halves its sales. Readers will be pleased to learn that Wolfram does not believe in equations—not only because they impede communication but because he also regards them as symptomatic of the old sort of mathematics that he wishes to move beyond. The weight of explanation rests instead on the text, and even more on the pictures. Wolfram has spent twenty years poring over computer-generated pictures that show the various kinds of complexity that can be generated by following simple rules repetitively. (A few samples can be seen at http://www.wolframscience.com/preview.) He is a gifted scientific communicator, and an outstanding feature of the book is the selection of these pictures of complexity and their clear and simple explanations in the text.

The virtues of the book are most evident in Wolfram's discussion of the notion of randomness. It is a concept that has caused immense confusion, with a great deal of scratching of heads as to whether computer-generated random numbers or the digits of π are "truly random." As Wolfram explains, there are three quite different concepts of randomness: first, being generated by a stochastic or chance process, like the throwing of coins; second, being patternless; and third, being incompressible, that is, not being generated by any short computer program. What has not been much appreciated is that the second and third definitions, the purely mathematical ones, do not at all apply to the same things. The digits of π, for example, are patternless, but generated by a quite simple program. Wolfram's distinction is sound, and it clears up a lot of confusion. He also argues that the stochastic concept of randomness is something of a chimera. If we ask what is happening physically with coin throwing, will we not see it as like a computer program, the complex series of coin outcomes being another instance of complexity internally generated by a simple mechanism?

Where Wolfram is not so convincing is in his vastly ambitious project to demonstrate that his idea will revolutionize all of human knowledge, from fundamental physics to the philosophy of free will. In long chapters on evolution, physics, perception, developmental biology, and so on he argues that science has hitherto taken a simplistic view of complexity, and that his own perspective both takes it seriously and explains without remainder how it arises. He suggests we see all the complexity in the universe as arising like that in the trails of Langton's ant—simply from the reiterated application of simple rules or programs. He argues that

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our ideas on complexity are biased by thinking about engineering, where "complex" systems are specifically designed by us to be simple enough so we can understand their workings. Nature does not operate under this restriction, he thinks, and so can let fly with really complex complexity.

The difficulty is that the engineering type of complexity, where parts interconnect to some purpose, is the interesting kind. Galen in his ancient classic *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* could discourse at length on the intricate connection of the parts of the hand and their usefulness for gripping, and conclude that such design pointed to a divine Designer. The same kind of modular, hierarchical structure, with parts working together to a purpose, is found in software, symphonies, and societies. The promise of Darwinian natural selection—of whose powers Wolfram is rather sceptical—was that it could explain *that* sort of design as caused by an easily understood random search process. Wolfram is blind to that sort of complexity and there is no clue in his book as to how cellular automata could possibly generate it. He is more interested in intricate patterning of the sort found in the coats of tortoiseshell cats. It is useful for camouflage, perhaps, but is otherwise a pointless sort of complexity—an expression, shall we say, of the Jackson Pollock aspect of Nature's artistry rather than the Rembrandt.

Wolfram is right, though, to insist that natural scientists need to understand the possibilities of simple causes producing complex effects, so as not to conclude that there must be complex causes, merely because there are complex effects. Cellular automata must be part of the armory of large-scale science.

There is one area of applied science on which Wolfram's perspective does cast genuine light. Perception is what mathematicians call an inverse problem, or what philosophers call inference of causes from effects. The visual system has amazing powers to "drink from the firehose of data"—to see patterns in its mass of input, and infer from them the true properties of the objects causing them. It can infer 3-D shape from a 2-D projection, shape from shading, its own motion from optical flow. Seeing patterns in data is, Wolfram says, like inferring the simple rules of a cellular automaton from its output. It is easy if the output is homogeneous or has simple repetitive structure like stripes or textures. It is possible with some difficulty for a few more complex patterns, like the nested or fractal patterns of ferns, but hopeless for truly complex patterns like those generated by the cellular automata he is principally interested in. That would be as hard as trying to guess the formula for π by looking at a stretch of its digits. He is again blind to the more "architectonic" patterns visible in, say, landscape paintings, which are visible to a trained perception that merges with aesthetic sensibility. Nevertheless, his approach to perception usefully sets the stage by placing the problems of perception in the correct abstract setting.

As many of the first readers of Wolfram's book have pointed out, it has many annoying features. He writes of the virtue of modesty: "Perhaps I might avoid some criticism by a greater display of modesty, but the cost would be a drastic reduction in clarity." Just about anything in the mathematical theory of how systems evolve in time is called "my discoveries"; elaborate speculations about life, the universe, and free will are preceded by "my strong suspicion is," as if that were a reason for believing them; one often wishes the text would stop repeating itself and exhibit more complex behavior. The scientific reaction is already shaping up the way it did to Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, of which scientists said, "His coverage of my area is certainly thin and ill-informed, but on all other parts of science he's most stimulating." The experts will complain, and rightly, but the general reader need not be too concerned. A book that generates a sense of excitement about new and comprehensible ideas in mathematics is an event worth celebrating.

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Master taxonomist

Wilfred Blunt Linnaeus: The Compleat Naturalist. Princeton University Press, 264 pages, $35

reviewed by Guy Davenport

First published more than thirty years ago (in 1970), Wilfred Blunt's thorough biography of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) has been made into a scrumptious coffee-table book. The elder brother of Christopher (merchant banker, authority on medieval coins) and Anthony (Poussin expert, Keeper of the Queen's Pictures, and Soviet spy), Wilfred, who taught at Eton, was a writer without frontiers, characteristically crowding his extensive knowledge into biographies of representative figures from a diversity of cultures.

Blunt has the British sense of fair-play and a reticent, decent distance from so accomplished a life as that of Linnaeus, paying great attention to the people Linnaeus knew in England, Holland, Germany, and Sweden. A later book by Sten Lindroth (Sweden's leading historian of science), Gunnar Erickson, Gunnar Broberg, and Tore Frangsmyr, *Linnaeus: The Man and His Work* (California, 1983), gives us a more complex and embarrassing Linnaeus as bogus doctor, egomaniac, loose-cannon theorist, and hopelessly amateurish scientist who "most probably delayed the development of modern biology, and not just in the Nordic countries" (Lindroth).

Linnaeus's enduring accomplishment was to perfect a naming system in Latin, universally comprehensible, for all living things. My tomcat Ejnar is *Felis catus*, of the family *Felidae; Felis* is his genus, *catus* (or *domesticus*) is his species. If he were (as he thinks he is) a tiger, he would be *Felis tigris*. There are animals who have only their Linnaean binomials for a name in English (e.g., boa constrictor). Philip Miller's authoritative *Gardner's Dictionary* began using the Linnaean nomenclature in 1768, and Peter Collinson, the dealer in plants, urged John and William Bartram (botanists to Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson) to adopt it. Louis XV ordered it (over Buffon's head) to be used at the Jardin des Plantes, insuring (after 1774) its European and American acceptance.

Medicine in eighteenth-century Sweden had not yet caught up with that of Hippocrates (died 485 B.C.). Linnaeus once put two teenage virgins in bed with a sick old man (as per 1 Kings 1:3 and 15), though he did suspect that microscopic "mites" were the carriers of disease, anticipating Pasteur by a century. But he believed in the phoenix and unicorns, and that swallows wintered at the bottom of ponds.

He doubted the biblical account of the universe, as well as other parts of Scripture. He went to church out of a sense of duty to propriety, he and his dog. When he was ill, the dog went in his stead, leaving (like his master) as the sermon droned into its second tedious hour.

Linnaeus the man is harder to get into focus than his crackpot science. A recent discovery of his travel diary in Lapland shows that a segment of his famous journey to the Saami is fiction. He deferred his marriage until age twenty-eight, after a four-year-long engagement. The wife was something of a termagant and shrew. His emotional life centered around his students whom he called his apostles. He sent them on far-flung expeditions to bring back botanical and zoological specimens. Nothing was excluded from his curiosity: he had Peter Kalm write his doctoral thesis on the American birch-bark canoe. He wrote a prodigious number of books.

He knew, and worked with, the leading British and European scientists of his time. He introduced the Ryvita biscuit to the English table (the recipe was his wife's). In Leiden he met Dr. Herman Boerhaave (the subject of Johnson's first life) by putting a news story in the local paper that he had corresponded with him for years. Boerhaave was outraged, but became good friends with Linnaeus when they eventually met.

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Linnaeus's more important patron in Amsterdam was the Anglo-Dutch director of the Dutch East India Company, George Clifford. One of Linnaeus's most beautiful books is the catalogue he made of Clifford's garden at Hartekamp, just outside Leiden (1738).

Linnaeus wrote four autobiographies. He wanted us to know that he was the greatest scientist, ever, the most celebrated and praised, and that no shadow from any direction fell on his unique genius. He had, like Adam, named all the animals (but correctly). He had named all the plants. Twenty-three of his students became professors. His birthplace and his house are Swedish shrines. He is a benevolent "Prince of Flowers" to Swedish schoolchildren. In Erik Nordenskiold's masterful *Biologins Historia* (3 volumes, Stockholm, 1924; English translation commissioned by Alfred Knopf, *The History of Biology*, 1928)—a splendid book with a patriotically Swedish tilt—Linnaeus is treated as respectfully as Emmanuel Swedenborg.

Blunt's biography is good to read and delicious to look at. Botanical illustration has never been handsomer than in the eighteenth century. The photographs of present-day Sweden have the lyric beauty of a Bergman film.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Why I became a conservative *by Roger Scruton*
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Notebook

Ivan Illich, 1926–2002

by Anthony Daniels

Ivan Illich, the polyglot Austro-Croatian-Sephardic-Mexican-American philosopher and social theorist, died at the beginning of December last in Bremen, Germany. He had his hour of fame in the first half of the 1970s, when he appeared to be the most radical radical on the market, but afterwards went out of fashion and soon faded both from view and from the bookshops. Among the documents I found during a recent internet search was a plaintive request from an aging devotee for information about Illich's current whereabouts and activities. The person asking for this information sounded distraught, like a blind man who had lost his guide dog.

Illich was valued during his comparatively short period of fame for the destructive possibilities of his criticisms of almost all the institutions of industrial society, capitalist or communist, in books such as *Deschooling Society* (1971) and *Medical Nemesis* (1975). Since there was not the slightest likelihood of anyone in the Soviet Union giving him a platform or taking him seriously, his criticisms appeared de facto to be of the left: but, on reading him, one is never quite sure whether he was a follower of Trotsky or Joseph de Maistre. His training as a Catholic priest—he later broke from the Church, having applied to it the very same criticisms he applied to all other institutions—was evident in all his work.

Illich delighted the political activists of his day with statements such as "For most men the right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school," and "The medical establishment has become a major threat to health." Could any sentiments be more revolutionary than those? Henceforth you could cheek a teacher, or challenge a doctor's diagnosis, secure in the knowledge that you were helping to bring about the deschooling or demedicalization that Illich advocated. He appeared to be against all forms of authority, even—or especially—those hitherto thought of as benign. For it was precisely in the seeming benignity of teachers and doctors that their danger lay.

And yet Illich was deeply conservative, or at least he would have been had he been born in the Middle Ages. The word reactionary fitted him quite well, insofar as he regarded pre-modern forms of existence as being in may ways superior to our own. He was an anti-Enlightenment figure: while he believed in the value of rational argument and of empirical evidence, and used them himself (as indeed did de Maistre), he certainly did not believe in a heaven on earth brought about by rational action on the part of benevolent governments and bureaucracies. He was completely unimpressed by supposed evidence of progress such as declining infant mortality rates, rising life expectancies, or increased levels of consumption. Indeed, he thought modern man was living in a hell of his own creation: the revolution of rising expectations was really the institutionalization of permanent disap-

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pointment and therefore of existential bitterness.

My attitude to Illich was composed half of admiration, half of irritation. He had a distinctly prophetic quality, but he could also be very silly, and some of the things he said were destructive of civilization itself. In *Deschooling Society*, for example, he stated that "The emerging counter-culture reaffirms the values of semantic content above the efficiency of increased and more rigid syntax." This endorsement of poor grammar is a little rich coming from a man who studied at the Gregorian University, had a doctorate in history from the University of Salzburg, and was completely fluent in at least five languages, all of which he spoke grammatically as well as idiomatically. No doctrine, indeed, could have been better fitted in practice to enclose forever the poor of western nations in the restricted world in which they found themselves, and exclude them permanently from the worlds of culture, science, and philosophy, while at the same time persuading the self-indulgent scions of privilege that the merest of their spontaneous vaporings was of imperishable value.

And yet in the same book Illich was undoubtedly prescient about the effects of the relentless hypertrophy of formal education and its attendant bureaucracy: how such hypertrophy would inexorably widen the gap between formal schooling and real education. And I think he was one of the few men who would genuinely have understood why, after several years of residence in Africa, I came to the conclusion that mass formal education in the western style was catastrophic in its effects on the continent. Such education is, indeed, the fifth horseman of the African apocalypse.

Medical Nemesis was Illich's book that most affected me. It was published just after I qualified as a doctor, and I was not entirely pleased to discover that in his opinion the whole medical enterprise was harmful to humanity: I was on duty every second night, and one of the very slight compensations for this unhappy state of affairs was the illusion I might be doing some good to that tiny part of humanity that came within my purview. Soon I was to go to Africa, where I encountered many people who walked fifty or one hundred miles, despite being very ill, to the hospital in which I worked. Either they mistook their own interests, or Illich was wrong.

Still, Illich's arguments were not so easily disposed of. He argued first that the health of a population had very little to do with its access to doctors and to medical care, and that the tangible benefits that doctors conferred were more than outweighed by the tangible harm that they did. He argued second (and more importantly) that the medical enterprise gave rise to unrealistic expectations in the population it served, disguising from it the fact that suffering was an inevitable part of human life and thus deforming its entire personality. Furthermore, medicine as a profession had inbuilt imperialist pretensions: more and more of ordinary human life came under its jurisdiction.

In many respects, Illich was both right and prescient. It is undoubtedly true that the health of a nation (within quite wide limits) is not proportional either to the number of doctors, to the amount spent per capita on health care. The principal effect of many screening procedures, practiced upon millions of people, is uselessly to raise their anxieties (they are generally entirely ignorant of the statistical reasoning upon which screening tests are performed). It is a moot point whether a technical triumph such as in vitro fertilization has increased the sum of human happiness by granting the dearest wish of a few, or decreased it by dashing the hopes of three times as many. Indeed, by raising the hopes in the first place, it has probably made the condition of childlessness, which might otherwise have been accepted with fortitude, worse than it was before. This was the kind of argument much favored by Illich, and it is far from completely irrational.

Moreover, the *Diagnostic and Statistical*

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Manual of the American Psychiatric Association renders so much of human behavior an illness that a satirical paper was once published in the *Lancet* suggesting that happiness, being outside the statistical norm, was a disease. This diagnostic expansionism would not have surprised Illich: on the contrary, he foresaw it and thought it was inevitable, once medicine was turned into a self-appointing profession with official powers. Nor would it have surprised him that the widespread prescription of allegedly powerful antidepressants has not lessened either human misery or dissatisfaction.

Illich was a modern opponent of the Promethean bargain, whose benefits the political right and left alike usually take for granted. According to Illich, modern man's fundamental error is to believe in the possibility of progress through advancing knowledge and technique, administered by others. This has led not only to a complete and alienating dependence on experts, but to a crudely materialist outlook, in which personal well-being is measured by physical possessions. I confess that whenever I see a crowd of shoppers, I think (as did Illich) of Sisyphus. Do the crowds really believe that the purchase of yet another unnecessary pair of jeans or piece of gadgetry, for the price of which they have labored, will afford them lasting satisfaction? Will they not be out shopping for even more equally unsatisfying items by the end of the week, because the former purchases disappointed, just as they always did in the past? And will they never learn from their own experience? Can novelty ever confer happiness upon them? Or are they on a treadmill, unable to get off for fear of understanding its futility?

In like manner, Illich saw pain as more than a mere technical problem to be solved by drugs and surgery. The medical profession, he said, holds out the false hope that pain (and other forms of suffering) can be eliminated by its ministrations. In the past, however, before the medical profession achieved its current importance and simulacrum of efficacy, pain and suffering were understood to be an intrinsic and unavoidable part of human life, that had inevitably to be faced and given meaning. In practice, it was religion that gave cosmic meaning not only to pain and suffering, but to the rest of life. Not to accept pain and suffering, when in fact they are as ineluctable as ever, whatever the medical profession might claim or encourage its clientele to hope, is paradoxically to increase their dominion: for without meaning, they are either arbitrary and meaningless, or unjust. To fight against suffering is therefore to increase suffering.

This is not only a point of view that the medical profession generally rejects, but is an answer to a question that it refuses to ask. At the same time, Illich was also guilty of some serious evasion: he did not provide us with a guide as to how to distinguish avoidable from unavoidable pain and suffering. In the context of an entire life, pain and suffering may be inevitable, but surely not that consequent upon the inadequate treatment of a broken leg. To distinguish between the two types calls for judgment: precisely the quality that a good doctor should have.

It would be easy to condemn Illich as a hypocrite. He believed in bicycles and speed limits of fifteen miles an hour, yet jetted around the world, crossing the Atlantic innumerable times, and never by ecologically-friendly row-boat. He condemned formal education, yet spent much of his career teaching in universities. But the obituary in *Le Monde* mentioned that for the last twelve years of his life, from the ages of sixty-four to seventy-six, he suffered from a disfiguring tumor for which he refused to seek medical treatment. No doubt his desire to prove a point lent meaning to his suffering. For myself, I find something moving in his stubbornness.

He was a flawed figure as a man and as a thinker: but so, no doubt, are we all. And unlike the other radicals of the era such as Herbert Marcuse, he still repays reading. Being not easily pigeon-holed, he forces us to think.

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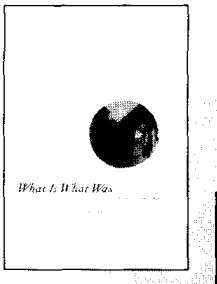

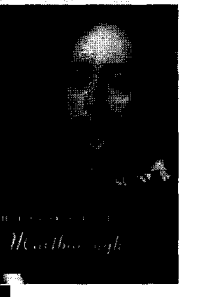

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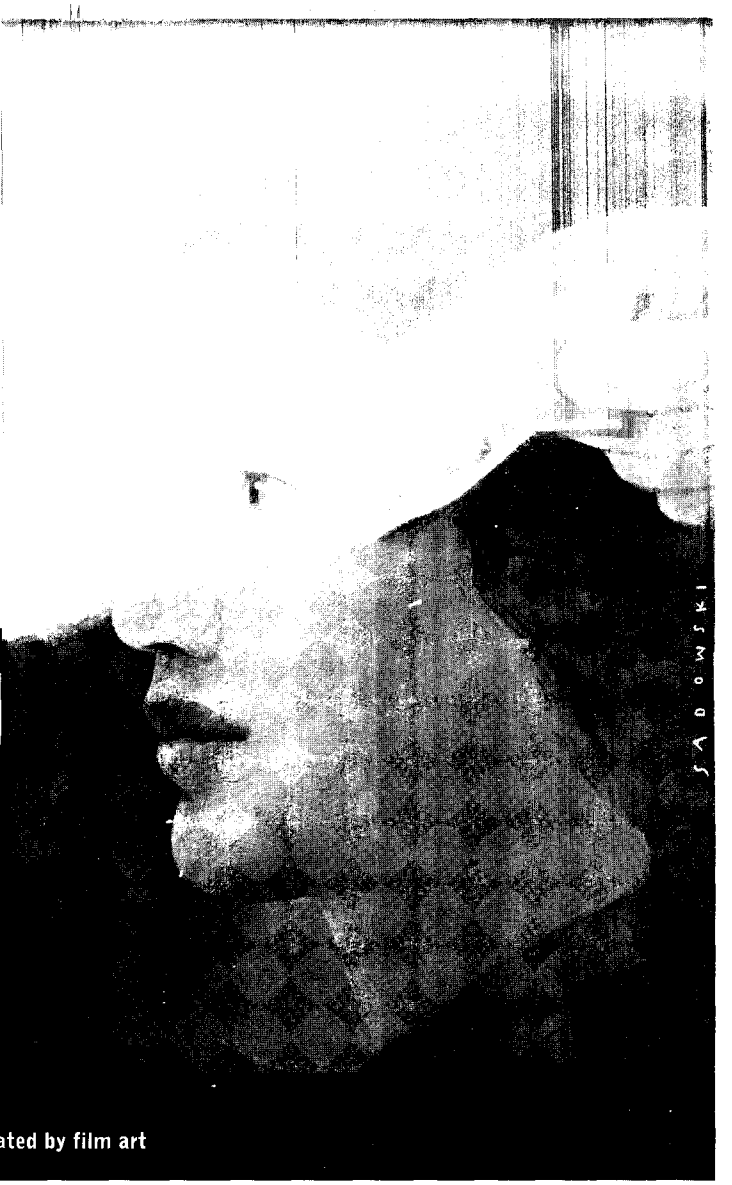

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